



JOHN BURROUGHS  
TALKS

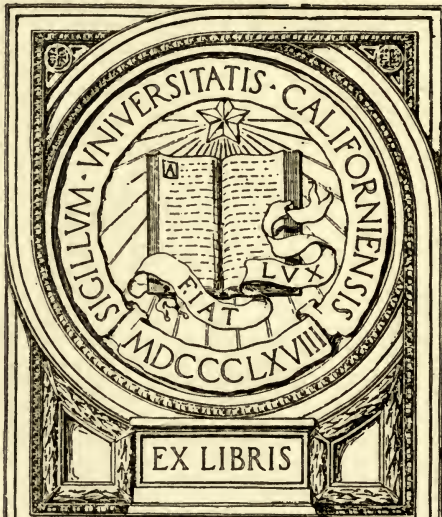


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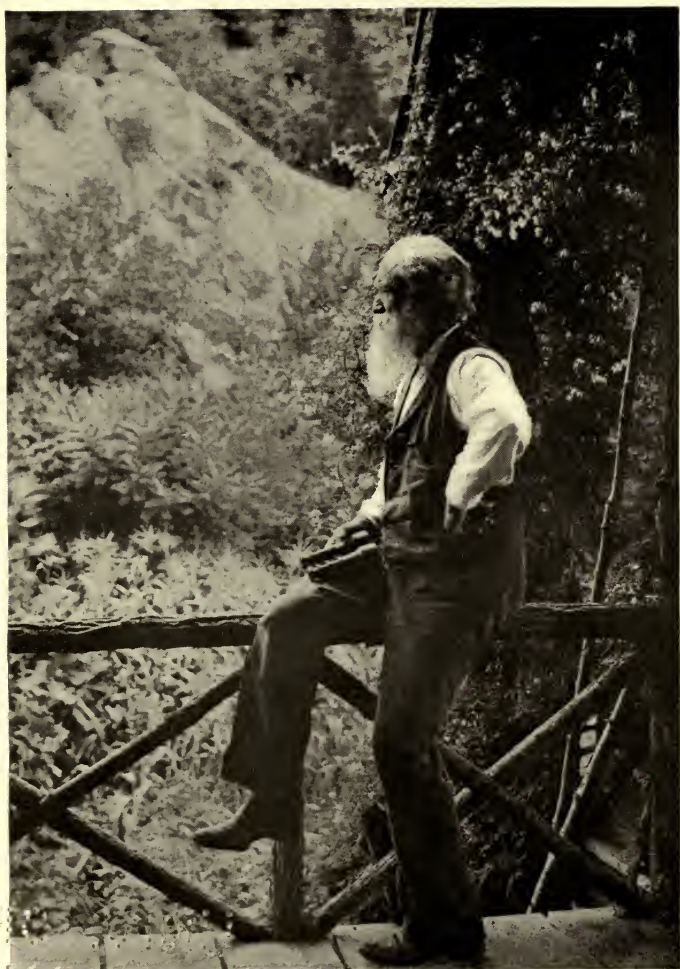
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

# **John Burroughs Talks**





THE  
END OF  
THE WORLD



*On Slabsides Porch*

# John Burroughs Talks

His Reminiscences and Comments

As reported by  
Clifton Johnson

Illustrated



Boston and New York  
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*English alumnus*

TO THE  
ALUMNI

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## Preface

ABOUT 1882 I began to read the nature essays of John Burroughs as they appeared from month to month in the magazines, and I was charmed at once with their portrayal of bird-life, their enthusiasm over the world out-of-doors, and the personality of the writer which his pages revealed. How wholesome it all was!

For years I was one of the author's many worshippers from afar, with no thought of ever meeting him; and then chance brought us together. I had no special knowledge of birds, but I dealt with outdoor themes in my own books, and I was a countryman and something of a dirt farmer, just as he was. We had both traveled in the British Isles and in France, and I was more or less intimately acquainted with various persons in whom he was interested. We continued to see each other rather frequently, and I illustrated two collections of his essays, and he was the subject of some writing I did for periodicals.

Never was there a better host, and if I made any untoward interruption in the tenor of his day-to-day routine he did not allow me to be aware of it. In conversation his originality, his lively interest in many things, and the wit and wisdom of his comments were unequaled in my experience. From the first I kept a

pretty full record of what he said — much of it taken down in notes while he spoke. My notes were made in long-hand, and I seldom caught complete sentences, but I put down enough to retain the words and phrases that were peculiarly his own, and the greater portion of this book is an attempt, based chiefly on the notes I gathered, to give a faithful report of Mr. Burroughs's unconventional talk.

I do not, however, include every detail, or retain repetitions, or get everything in the order it was said, and I have tried to avoid narrating again what is to be found in his own or other books unless his talk contained something fresh in substance or manner. I have dwelt on what seemed important, omitted much of the trivial and unessential, and combined most of the talk topically and in its natural sequence. Mr. Burroughs and I discussed the proper handling of such material as I collected, and the method I have adopted had his approval.

My first Burroughs interview was printed in the *Outlook*, and I sent him the proof before publication. When he returned the proof he wrote: "You have caught the drift of our conversation and often the very words and spirit with great skill. We had a good talk and I hope that we may have more of them."

One of his remarks in this interview was that "the people in New York State read nothing but dime novels and the Sunday papers." Of course, in a literal

sense, that is not true of the several millions of inhabitants of the State. It is a very sweeping assertion of a kind that he often made. But the habit of making sweeping assertions is not uncommon. You can even find instances of the sort in the Bible. Burroughs simply adopted a racy way of indicating that he thought the people of his State did comparatively little reading that had informative or cultural value.

“That interview made more stir in my correspondence than anything else I ever was concerned in,” he said to me a few months after it appeared. He was taken sharply to task for his comment on New York readers, but he apparently had no regrets.

Remarks that are similar to the one quoted in their exaggeration are not infrequent in this book, but the underlying meaning is usually evident, and they are so characteristic of the speaker that I have not cared to delete them.

He talked freely about his friends, and he never “whitewashed” them. Note what he says of Whitman, Roosevelt, Edison, and Ford, and of Lincoln and Wilson — yes, and of Mrs. Burroughs. He found flaws in all of them, but their admirable traits were also emphasized, and in his strictures on the several famous men he has brought out nothing new except in the spirited individuality of his expression.

A great deal of what he said, as we talked together, was reminiscent, and this, now that I have collated it,

sketches in a somewhat desultory way his life-story; but there are also comments that run far afield into the realms of politics, religion, philosophy, science, and literature.

It should be observed that my division of the material into chapters is rather arbitrary. Each chapter, as a rule, consists of a short report of a visit combined with a talk on some definite topic; but the talk is not entirely realistic, because it gathers together what Mr. Burroughs said at various times on that subject. I wished to avoid the confusion of scattered and unrelated items. Of course, I made many comments and asked many questions during the interviews, but I think readers will prefer to follow Burroughs without such interruptions, and I have contributed little to the text beyond acting as the recorder of his words. My purpose has been to give those who read these pages as intimate a contact as possible with one of the great men of his generation.

A literary acquaintance of much experience has assured me that the public wants a deified Burroughs, and that only by presenting him in such an aspect can what I have written win general favor. Nevertheless, I have chosen not to omit what seems to me significant, and in reaching this decision I have been largely guided by the advice of Mr. Ray Stannard Baker, whose reportorial work in connection with notable men and events is famous, Dr. J. H. Van Sickle, one of the best known of New England school superin-



tendents, and Mr. Waldo L. Cook, chief editorial writer of the *Springfield Republican*.

Some of this material has appeared in periodicals, and my thanks are due to the *Outlook* and to *Country Life in America* for permission to republish the articles they printed. I am also grateful to Dr. Clara Barrus, the authorized biographer of Mr. Burroughs, for criticism of the manuscript and information that I have found useful in preparing the book for the press. The illustrations are from photographs which I made on my visits. Mr. Burroughs was very good about posing, and the only time he ever protested was when he was kindling his study fire, and the increasing heat of the flames made him uncomfortable before I had quite finished.

CLIFTON JOHNSON

HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS



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## **John Burroughs Talks**

At length I saw a man with a full white beard approaching. He had on neither coat nor vest, and his raiment, from his straw hat to his dusty shoes, had plainly had much experience with sun and weather. He looked like a vigorous elderly farmer. This was John Burroughs.

I introduced myself, and after he had got his mail, he took me to his Riverby home, the stone house he had built twenty years before. It was on the higher part of his farm that terraced up from the Hudson, and was hidden from the highway by a little grove of evergreens.

My host and I were soon on very comfortable terms, and I spent the day with him. Most of the time we sat talking in a little rustic summer-house that overlooked his vineyard and the quiet river with its steamers and tug-towed canal-boats and drifting sails. But there were some not unpleasant interruptions, as when we went to pick peas and cherries for dinner, or when I accompanied him while he gave orders to his farm helpers.

One of the things I questioned Burroughs about on this visit was his early life, and in response he said:

"I was born on a farm at Roxbury, New York, in the western Catskills, on April 3d, 1837. April 3d is Washington Irving's birthday too.

"I have always taken pleasure in the fact that April was my birth month, for it is my favorite

spring month, and spring is my favorite season. That is when I feel the keenest enjoyment of life out-of-doors. Nature is awakening, the atmosphere is full of delicate odors and signs, the birds are returning, flowers are opening, and there are veins of warmth in the air. Things are replete with suggestion. You are not cloyed as you sometimes are later in the height of the season. There's just enough.

"Besides, there is an interesting stir on the farm in April. It is the month of starting anew preparations for getting a living from the soil. I nearly always make a point, about the time my birthday comes round, of going back to the old family home to help in the maple-sugar making and renew my youth among the scenes of my boyhood.

"My Grandfather and Grandmother Burroughs came to Roxbury from an adjoining county about 1795, and their neighbors helped to build a house of logs, with a roof of black-ash bark. But in my early life the town was past the pioneer period, although still far from railroads. Our three-hundred-and-fifty-acre farm was two miles from the central village in a high outlying district known as the West Settlement. The district to the east of ours was Hardscrabble, and that to the south was Shacksville.

"The house in which I was born was a humble story-and-a-half frame structure, unpainted and weather-worn. It was never entirely finished upstairs. Just one room was done off, and the rest of



the space was a big chamber open to the rafters. The house stood near the highway overlooking a broad valley, and back of it rose a steep smooth hill that had a wooded top. We called this hill the Old Clump. On its slope, forty or fifty rods from the house, was our spring, and the water ran down to the yard through piping made of bored logs. The logs would rot in a few years so they'd leak, and we'd have to dig 'em up and lay new ones. We'd get the logs from the woods, and a man would come from the village with a long augur, and bore them and shape the ends to fit together. Some one told father that poplar was good for this purpose, and he tried it once, but it decayed so soon he did n't use it again.

"The spring never gave out while I lived on the old place, nor has it given out since until recently. It seems as though there was less rainfall than formerly. There are streams in which I used to catch trout, where now you can't catch a lizard. They've dwindled wonderfully for some reason or other. The water's gone. I suppose the time is coming when the old planet will dry up, but the drying during a man's lifetime would hardly be observable.

"My father's education went no further than the three R's, but that did n't prevent his teaching for a few winters. Mother was one of his pupils. She learned to read, but not to write or cipher.



"Father thought he was full of the old Adam when he was young, and he used to tell of how quarrelsome and wicked he had been. But he was always true at heart and never would lie, steal, cheat, backbite, or anything of that sort. In early manhood he 'experienced religion,' joined the Old-School Baptist Church, and stopped horse-racing and card-playing, which were considered disreputable, ceased swearing, and went to church.

"He was easily irritated, but as a rule his irritation found vent in loud and harmless barking, and so does mine.

"It is from my mother that I inherit my idealism and my romantic tendencies. She was of Irish descent. Her maiden name was Kelly.

"I had five brothers and four sisters, and was the seventh of the ten children. None of us had more than five children. I had one, a son. All together we had only fifteen.

"You know how much children in the same family will differ. I was an odd one among those at my old home. When we had visitors and they got to asking the children's names and ages, and my turn came, they'd say to the folks, 'That ain't your boy, is it?'

"I used to feel as cheap, and I'd hang my head in shame. Well, I was n't like the others. I was different, and always have been — not better, only different.

“About the first thing I remember is of being scared. Father and mother had gone off to Pennsylvania on a visit and left us children to take care of things while they were away. We got along well enough in the daytime, but, come night, we were lonesome. I know that the evening after the folks started, the older children were out quite late. I believe they’d gone down to the village. It got dark, and still they did n’t come home, and we three or four younger ones sat huddled up in the kitchen and did n’t dare go to bed. I can’t say what scared the others, but I recall looking into the dark cavity of the bedroom — that was father’s and mother’s room, and the door was open — and every time I looked into the bedroom’s gloom and vacancy I was filled with dread and foreboding.

“We used to hear a good many spook stories. Gran’ther Kelly was a great hand for them. His home was eight miles away over a mountain, but he used to come and spend a few days with us occasionally, and he moved to a little house on the borders of our farm when I was about eleven years old. He’d been one of Washington’s soldiers and had had so much experience that we could n’t help accepting as gospel truth what he said. He believed in spooks just as much as I don’t believe in them, and he’d sit down in the evening and tell ghost stories by the hour. It would make our youthful hair stand on end as we listened to the tale of the things he’d



*The "Old Yellow Church" of the Old School Baptists*



*The Little Cemetery at the Turn of the Road*



*At the Edge of the Sap-Bush*



seen — those dreadful apparitions. He used to tell bear stories, war stories, and Indian stories, but the spooks made the most vivid impression.

“Father had two barns near the old home and they were both fearsome places to me. One stood just across the road from the house, but from the age of ten to fourteen I would n’t go into that barn after dark lest some hobgoblin should get me. I was afraid to visit the other barn down in the next field even in the daytime. We kept cows there, and each morning it was my task to turn them out and clean the stables.

“I would enter the barn in fear and trembling. My anxiety was greatest in the stable on account of a hole there in the floor that opened down into the barn cellar. This cavity was always dark and mysterious, and I used to call the dog and send him under the barn to drive the spooks away. Then I’d work like a beaver to get the stables cleaned before the dog got sick of his job and came out. My fears all had their source in gran’ther’s stories of witches and things. He was really remarkably good at telling such stories. He was very superstitious, and he gave them a true air of mystery.

“Up the highway from the house was a little cemetery at a turn of the road, and it troubled me a good deal. I knew that spooks liked to haunt just such places, and you could n’t have drawn me there with ox-chains after dark. I did n’t think of spooks in



broad daylight, but when dusk came and I had to pass the burying-ground, I would walk fast and step lightly. I was too scared to run, for it seemed to me, if I did run, I'd have a whole pack of ghosts right on my heels. I suppose many persons have the same feeling in similar circumstances.

“My dread of spooks was n't outgrown until I got old enough to make evening calls on the girls. Then my fears suddenly left me. I'd been thinking I could n't go to see the girls at all and stay out late, I was so afraid as soon as night came. What a relief it was! I could come home past the burying-ground in the little hours of the morning without a tremor.

“I don't think I was naturally timid. The fear was the result of having my imagination stimulated and distorted by what I heard. People believed thoroughly in apparitions then. I was n't scared by sounds in nature. Nothing that I knew about frightened me. I was never afraid of thunder-storms. I rather liked the racket and was agreeably impressed by the elemental display. I heard owls hoot, but I did n't mind that, for I knew the birds that did the hooting. Neither did I mind the barking of foxes. I would hear them on the hill back of the house, and their barking was a wild, weird sort of sound that I liked.

“But if I had to go through the woods in the dark, I was scared. I recollect driving the oxen home in the late twilight along the edge of some woodland

down below the house, and how fearful I was. I did n't know what I feared, but my nerves were affected by the strangeness of the woods in the coming gloom and the liability to see things. The woods themselves were quiet enough. They always are. You know Thoreau says: 'A howling wilderness never howls. The howling is done chiefly by the imagination of the traveler.'

"Probably most children have fears similar to mine and go through the same kind of experiences. I doubt, though, if my boy ever did. He certainly was told no ghost stories. Still, he believed in Santa Claus. I think I never had that belief myself. My folks did n't cultivate the Santa Claus myth. We children would hang up our stockings in the chimney-corner the night before Christmas, but the next morning we always knew where the things in 'em came from. Perhaps there'd be cakes mother had baked for us, or it might be that the older children had put in some ridiculous things like shavings or a raw potato.

"When my son was a little fellow, he believed in Santa Claus through and through. One day, shortly before Christmas, he found a sled out in the barn. He came to the house in the greatest excitement about that sled. My wife and I said, 'Perhaps Santa Claus intends to give it to you, and like enough you will get it on Christmas morning.'

"Sure enough, when he woke up on Christmas

Day, there was the sled hitched to his bed. That made a deep impression on him. Later we told him there was no Santa Claus, and he felt as if he had suffered a personal loss. I remember how he sighed and said, 'Well, if there ain't any Santa Claus there's an awful lot of lying in this world.'

"Speaking about being afraid, there was a half-crazy old man named John Corbin who used to wander about the Catskills country. We children made a good deal of a bugbear of him. He was perfectly harmless and innocent, but we were in mortal terror of the old man. Whenever we saw any one coming slowly along the road the way he did, we'd say, 'Guess that's old John Corbin!' Then we scurried over the fence and hid. He was simply a little off, you know, and mumbled to himself as he walked. He had an orchard down near the schoolhouse, and he buried his apples there in the ground. Some of the bigger boys broke into his apple-hole and stole apples, and I can remember just how he caught them at it and chased them away and shook his stick at them.

"Most every family used to have an apple-hole. We had one up back of our house and each fall stowed fifteen or twenty bushels of our best apples there. Toward spring we'd dig 'em out, and they had a delightful flavor that apples kept in the house did n't have. We'd reach down through the opening we'd cut in the frozen ground, and part away the

straw that lay over them, and pick out such apples as we wanted. We became so expert that we could tell the various kinds by the sense of touch. There was a difference in the shape and in the surface. I recognized the winesap by some peculiarity of the stem. All kinds were there in the apple-hole mixed together. A considerable portion of them we took to school to eat with our dinners.

“Mother used to spin wool. She had a big spinning-wheel upstairs in the chamber, and when she was using it you’d hear it every few moments go w-z-z-z-z! and you’d hear her footsteps as she walked backward and forward. These were pleasant enough sounds, but they grew rather monotonous when you heard them all day. In the hog-pen chamber back of the house mother carded wool into rolls, and she had a loom there on which she wove cloth.

“I helped her by running the quill-wheel and winding thread on the hollow elder-stalks she used in the shuttles. I can’t say that I liked the work much. A boy is n’t apt to be fond of work. It is n’t natural that he should be. He’d rather go fishing or hunting.

“I pulled flax some, and mother spun and wove it and made garments out of it for us to wear. That linen was amazingly stout. If you fell from a tree, and trousers or shirt made out of that stuff caught on a branch, you’d hang there. The cloth would n’t tear. Our new linen shirts were pretty harsh when



we put them on at the beginning of warm weather. They were full of shives, and scratched like blazes. They resembled the hair shirts that were worn by the pious old fellows of the Middle Ages, and if you were doing penance for any of your sins they were good things to have. Use and the rubbing they got on the washboard served to break up the shives by August, and then we'd begin to take a little comfort in wearing the shirts. At first the cloth was grayish in color, but in time it faded to white as the result of scrubbing in soapy water and laying out on the grass to dry.

"We did n't have underclothing in summer, but in winter we wore red flannel undershirts that would shrink in the wash and get thick as boards.

"I used to help make cheese. I was very fond of eating the curd till one day I ate so much of it I was sick — made a hog of myself, you know. I got thoroughly cloyed that time and never have been able to eat any curd since. But I like the pot-cheese that is made out of lobbered milk.

"We got up at five o'clock in the morning much of the year. In winter it would be a little later, but before daylight, so we had our breakfasts by candlelight. We youngsters went to bed at eight o'clock, and I know I used to get sleepy before that. Mother was apt to sit up latest. I suppose she'd often be up sewing for us till ten or eleven o'clock. What a life of unending toil hers was!

"We had a wide open fireplace built of stone. Mother would sharpen a knife by rubbing it on the jambs, and she'd fry meat in a long-handled frying-pan. How vividly it all comes back!

"I recall lying on the broad hearthstone before the fire watching the crickets come out of the cracks to sing. I would catch them and kill them. Mother said they ate holes in the stockings. They were never detected in the act so far as I know, and I imagine that was just a household superstition without foundation.

"Up at one side of the fireplace was a great brick oven where our bread was baked. Once a week or so mother would say in the morning, 'Well, we're going to bake to-day, and I want some oven-wood.' Then some of us children would have to hunt the place over for dry wood — wood that could be depended on to flash up quick and make a hot fire.

"Tallow candles were our light. We used dipped candles. I remember seeing mother make them — dip, dip, dip, into the melted tallow forty times or more — and after each dip the rods from which the wicks were suspended were put across the backs of two chairs to let the tallow harden. Our candlesticks had hooks on 'em. The hook was made to fit over the back of a chair. Mother would hook her candle, or perhaps two of them, on the back of a chair in order to see to do her work, and I'd sit in the chair and study arithmetic, or read



'Robinson Crusoe' or some other book that interested me.

"While I was still a small boy, we put a stove in the kitchen in front of the fireplace. I had to bring in wood for it. I thought that was quite a stunt in winter. Back of the house was a great woodpile, and I'd have to dig the sticks out of the snow. For a woodbox we used the big open fireplace behind the stove. It was like a yawning cavern, and filling it was no small matter. I'd dump the wood down in front so it would seem to be full as soon as possible, but father would come and expose my fraud by pushing the wood back, and he would say, 'John, look at that!'

"Sometimes I'd pile the wood on a hand-sled and jerk the sled up the steps and draw it right into the house. That seemed more fun than to carry the wood in my arms.

"We had a stove in 'the other room,' but supplying that with wood did n't worry me, because we never fired up the stove there unless we had company.

"The house was n't very tight, especially around the doors and windows, and we did n't lack for fresh air. There was a crack under the kitchen door, and when we had a northeast snowstorm we'd get up in the morning to find a little snowdrift blown in half across the room.

"Occasionally, too, the snow would blow in onto

my bed. The room where I slept was ceiled, not plastered, and the windows were loose, and perhaps some of the glass would be broken. If a whole pane was gone, the space was stopped up with rags. We got all the fresh air there was going, but we did n't suffer with the cold. Two of us slept in a bed, or three when we were little, and it was a feather bed — yes, yes!

“We used to kill our own beef, and in winter you'd see a quarter hung up in the milkhouse frozen hard. As we needed it for eating, we'd take a very sharp knife and shave it off in thin slices.

“I never could eat salt pork as a boy. I sniffed at it and snorted at it, and in the prejudice of youth was sure it was n't fit to eat. But I eat it now, and I know it sets well on my stomach.

“How fat our pigs would get! They could hardly see out of their eyes. We'd boil a great cauldron of potatoes and pumpkins for 'em if we were short of milk. When a litter was born in the winter or early spring, we'd often have to tide the piggies over a cold spell by taking them into the house. The runt, as we called the smallest of the batch, nearly always had to have some care. The piggies were pink and clean with nice little noses, and I liked to handle them and feel their rubber-like flesh as they wriggled around. As pigs grow older, they get coarse and disagreeable, but when they are young, they are so active and springy I want to get in among them and caress them.

“Pig-killing time came in the late autumn, and it was a great day when the pigs were slaughtered. Operations began some cold morning, and it was my business to keep up a fire in the yard under a big kettle of water. I never helped by tackling a pig. We’d kill six or seven, and one after another souse ’em into the hot water, and scrape ’em, and hang ’em up in a row. At dark we carried ’em into the cellar and laid ’em on planks on the cellar bottom. There they were cut up, and the hams were salted down. The spare-ribs — how good those were! I tell you they were sweet; and the pickled pigs’ feet were delicious too.

“We used to have buttermilk pop. I’d like some now. It was made by putting the buttermilk on the stove and stirring in cornmeal to make quite a thick porridge. We’d eat it hot with molasses.

“Another dish we were crazy for was thickened milk. We had it regularly on Sunday night. I’ve never had it anywhere else, but it was good all the same. We’d heat new milk to the boiling point and stir in flour and add a little salt. The flour would form into small lumps, and then we’d take out three or four spoonfuls at a time and eat it with cold milk. We’d chew those soggy lumps, and they had a sweet agreeable taste, but were perfectly indigestible, I suppose.

“Now and then we’d have a bag pudding of yellow cornmeal put into the kettle of pork and po-

tatoes when a boiled dinner was being prepared. Mother was sure to make those bag puddings in haying-time. I don't suppose I'll ever have one again.

"It's a wonder where our folks ever got enough to stop all our mouths. What appetites we did have! We'd come home from school at night famished and go round each eating a buttered pancake. We could n't wait till we got to the supper-table.

"I was about seven years old when we had an anti-rent war in the Catskills. A great many of the farms there were leased land. Back in Colonial times the English king had granted immense sections of that region to certain of his court favorites, who divided it up among favorites of their own. All this land had to pay the heirs of those old favorites a tax of a shilling an acre. Of course they never had anything to do with the land, but settlers took it and improved it and made their homes on it.

"The people who lived on the land thought the tax was unjust. So they took the law into their own hands and said they were n't going to pay this tax any more. They got the idea of disguising themselves as Indians. They wore leather caps pulled over their faces, and were all paint, fur, and feathers — dreadful-looking creatures! Father sympathized with their side, and they used to call at our house, and we would give them apples and other things to eat or drink. They were usually just out on a lark.



It was all foolishness, and did n't amount to anything; but the feeling was very bitter and divided the neighborhood.

"The down-renters, disguised as Indians, did most of their roaming round nights, but they would come together any time of day at the signal of the blowing of a horn. They gave orders that nobody should blow a horn except as a summons for them to gather. Jay Gould's father lived in our same district, not much more than a mile away, and he was one of the up-renters, or "Tories" as their opponents liked to call them. He was a stiff-necked old fellow, and he declared he was going to blow his horn to call his men to dinner, whether or no. So blow it he did, and the first thing the old gentleman knew he had his house full of those hobgoblin Indians threatening to tar and feather him.

"On another occasion, when news had got round that the sheriff was going to sell out a man who would n't pay his rent, the Indians gathered at the sale and shot the sheriff.

"They became so lawless that the legislature had to take the matter in hand and try to suppress the Indians and imprison their leaders. I'd see the sheriff and his posse ride past — twenty or thirty or even fifty men galloping pell-mell — and I was scared. They'd go rushing along on their horses, flourishing swords and muskets. It was a terrible sight for a youngster. My fears were the greater

because the posse represented the law, and my sympathy, of course, was with my own people. I was n't so afraid of the down-renter Indians.

"Father thought the posse was after him one day, and he ran over to Gran'ther Kelly's and got under a bed. We had great fun over that, for it was said that his feet stuck out, and that his hiding would n't have done him any good if the sheriff's men had really been after him, which they were n't. But they did try to lay hands on a neighbor who was a leader among the down-renters. He got away to Michigan and stayed there several years before he dared to come back.

"I went to a great down-renter meeting one time. The horns blew long and loud over the hills, and the men put on their Indian disguise and started for the meeting-place. Their leather caps were something like a bag with holes cut for the eyes, nose, and mouth. There were horns on the caps, and a fringe round the neck, and a cow's tail tied on behind, and I don't know what-all. Oh! those caps were hideous-looking things — perfectly infernal — and no two were alike. The Indians had blouses of striped calico, belted at the waist, and some of them had pants of the same material or of red flannel. Take a hundred men together dressed up in that style, and it made a sight to behold.

"The meeting was held in a big empty hay-barn. I went and peeked through the cracks, and the



Indians stuck out straw at me. They had their orators, and it seemed to me that the affair was something tremendous. There was such a lot of them that I was convinced they'd carry everything before them.

"But they did n't go at the matter in the right way. Their lawlessness and outlandishness hurt their cause, and the farmers still have to pay rent. Our old farm, like the rest, has to pay its yearly shilling an acre just as it did when I was a boy."

While Burroughs and I were still talking in the summer-house in the latter part of the afternoon, he pointed, and said:

"There's a marsh hawk. Don't you see him — way down the hill, near the trees along the shore? I think he has a nest not far off, or he would n't come so freely. He's the deadly enemy of the other birds, and they know it. Everything skulks and opens its eyes when he comes around. How the birds will scream at him and abuse him and follow him about!

"A kingbird is after him now. Kingbirds are very saucy. You'll see them perch on the backs of some of the biggest hawks we have and worry them. But the marsh hawk can make a very quick upward turn in his flight and strike his talons so suddenly into a pursuer as to make him dangerous. The kingbirds and all the birds seem to know the difference. They

keep at a respectful distance and are ready to rush into a tree where he can't follow, if he turns on them.

"Do you hear my wood thrush? He begins about four o'clock every afternoon and sings until sundown. There he is behind us on a twig of that tree-trunk. See how well he carries himself — what fine manners and breeding! I never knew wood thrushes to steal fruit. They only take what is fallen to the ground — never pick it from the trees. They are the finest songsters of our groves and fields — their song has such hymn-like qualities and is so perfectly sincere and melodious. The hermit thrush has a still more beautiful song, but is so secluded a bird that few people ever hear him.

"If anything were to happen to my bird or his nest, he would stop his song, and I would know instantly there was trouble. Early in the season another thrush had a nest down by the shore. He had a most monotonous song that was entirely lacking in the golden trill that this bird has. He kept harping on one string, and I thought to myself that if I lived under the hill that song would be intolerable, and I would have to take my gun and put a stop to it. One day the bird left off singing. His nest had been robbed. But lately I've heard that same doleful harping down in the woods in the next field, and I know he must have started a new nest there.

"People have an idea that all birds of a kind sing

alike, but in reality their voices differ just as do those of people. There is sometimes a bird Tennyson or Browning that has surpassing qualities in his song. You find master songsters among orioles and wood thrushes and bobolinks and all the birds. You can likewise hear those that are far below the average.

"I knew a bobolink once which was unfortunate that way. His voice was hoarse and broken. Yet he was just as proud of his song. He went through it with the same ecstasy and ended it with the same air, as if he'd done something wonderful.

"When I bought this place, one of the finest trees on it grew where you see that stump off to the right of the summer-house. I was two years making up my mind to cut down the tree, though all the time it was hurting the view and spoiling one corner of my vineyard. Yes, I find it dreadful hard to start cutting down a tree. You can undo the work of a century in an hour. I agonize over the necessity of it for days and weeks. I would n't sacrifice that clump of trees down the path, halfway to the river, for anything in the world. I like its motion. It's an object to look at, and it attracts the birds.

"Recently I had a letter from a man in my native town inquiring for the titles of my books, and their prices. I get letters from all over the country, and there are places in the West where they have 'Burroughs Days,' but that's the first sign of in-

terest in my books that has reached me from my native village.

“It was a great while before my neighbors here knew that I wrote books. They saw me go round with my big shoes and rough clothes and never suspected it. The fact is, the people in this State read nothing but dime novels and the Sunday papers. We have no real readers. The moment you strike New England you strike a different atmosphere. The people are alert, they discuss, they have literary clubs. In the West, too, the people have a great capacity for reading and devouring things. I get letters much oftener from the West than from the East. There’s new blood out there that’s going to be heard from, I tell you. They have more sky-room, a fresh environment, and they are destined to be an improved New England in scope, liberality, and enthusiasm.

“This home of mine is pretty well situated in many respects, but it is n’t always easy to get a good water-supply hereabouts. How to know where you’ll strike water under the ground is a problem. A while ago a well was started near our railroad station at a spot located by a man with a peach crotch. Of course, there was no sense nor science in his performance. Later I had this man come to search my premises for water — the old humbug! He said peach wood was good for his purpose because there was metal in it. I had another



expert of his sort come at the same time, but they could n't agree as to where water was to be found. Either they deceived deliberately or were themselves deceived. The peach crotch was held upright in such a way that a little movement of the fingers, which might be involuntary, would cause it to dip.

“‘But see!’ the man would say, ‘it pulls so hard it twists off the bark in my hands.’

“However, that was simply due to his grip on the twigs. To make a man’s opinion on such a subject of value, he needs not only to be an accurate observer of things, but he must know himself.”



## II

*January, 1895*

### BOYHOOD IN THE CATSKILLS

THE train schedules of the West Shore Road did not suit my convenience, and I made my railway trip on the other side of the Hudson to a station nearly opposite Burroughs's home. I alighted from the train at seven o'clock in the evening and walked across the river on the ice in the night gloom.

As soon as I reached the house, Burroughs insisted on getting supper for me, and when it was on the table Mrs. Burroughs joined us and we talked while I ate. She evidently felt a need of restraining her husband in some of his acts and opinions, and when he became more lively than she approved, she would mildly attempt to tone him down. Once she said to me apologetically: "I'm afraid his talking is keeping you from eating. It's a way he has."

After supper we three sat in the library. Julian, the son, a school boy (1878 was the year of his birth), was studying in his room. "I don't like to have him study evenings the way he does," Burroughs declared. "It's not the time for such work, and I don't believe buckling down to studying at night is good for school-children mentally or physically."

At half-past nine my hosts escorted me to my

chamber, where I remarked on the oddity of a small low oval window.

"That was a crazy notion of mine when I was building," Burroughs said deprecatingly. "I thought it would look well from the outside, and I had it put in — that useless little window! I ought to have had a great wide one there to take advantage of the beautiful view over the Hudson. When you build a house you just want to get things comfortable and attractive inside, and the outside will take care of itself. I'll knock out that wall sometime and fix the window right."

"Oh, no, you won't," Mrs. Burroughs commented.

"Well, perhaps I never shall," he acknowledged.

The next morning at breakfast I told Mrs. Burroughs I did n't care for coffee, when she passed it to me.

"But it's a cold morning," she responded, "and I think you'd better have a cup."

Then Burroughs said: "Johnson, don't you drink the coffee unless you want it. You are better off without it, and so would other people be. Coffee stimulates. It's a kind of poison. I used to drink it every morning at breakfast, and presently I found that if I did n't get it as usual I had a roaring headache by nine o'clock.

"After I stopped drinking coffee I took to tea. But I found that worked against me too, and I gave it up.

“No one drank coffee up in my country in my youth, but they drank green tea. They’d boil it in the pot, and, as a matter of economy, they’d get all they could out of it by steeping it over. It was vile stuff. Mother would drink it cold between meals, and she’d eat the tea leaves. No doubt her use of tea shortened her days. I often went to the buttery myself at night, after returning from a drive to the village or elsewhere, and took a drink of cold tea from the nose of the tea-pot.”

While we were still breakfasting, Burroughs asked after the health of W. D. Howells, whom I met occasionally.

I replied that I thought Mr. Howells was well, though I did see him take some pills when I lunched with him the last time I was in New York.

“He takes pills, does he?” Burroughs remarked regretfully. “I’m sorry to hear that. If he’s begun to take drugs he’ll kill himself. He ought to have a woodpile as I have. I do a good-sized job of chopping every afternoon. The open fire down at my study and another here at the house have to be kept supplied with wood, and chopping is the best exercise in the world. Besides, the way I manage things I get the heat out of my wood twice — once in chopping it and again in burning it.

“Mr. Howells promised he’d come up to see me in the spring, but I’m afraid he won’t. I think he has the feeling that I’d talk him to death, and that

I'd follow him about and keep him visiting hard all the time. I wish he could understand that he could do just as he pleased when he got here, and that he could poke about by himself and need n't talk at all if he did n't want to."

"You did n't use to like Howells as well as you do now," Mrs. Burroughs observed. "He sent back your manuscripts when he was editor of the 'Atlantic' and that made you mad."

"But his objections were well founded," Burroughs said. "I always revised the manuscripts before trying elsewhere with them."

After breakfast Burroughs and I walked over to the post-office at the station. Julian, in a blue soldier coat with some books under his arm, accompanied us. He was going down by train to Poughkeepsie, where he attended a military school.

Later, when the sun had got well up in the sky, we went down to where an enormous ice-house loomed at the edge of the river. "The new ice is not quite thick enough yet for harvesting," Burroughs told me. "The families in the vicinity depend on the twenty-five or thirty dollars apiece that the men earn icing to get them through the winter."

We rambled along among the ragged thickets intermitting with open spaces that bordered the stream. The ice was expanding in the heat, and there was a continuous zipping of cracks with a sound that Burroughs called the voice of the ice-frogs.



As we were crossing a little farm, he said: "The crops on this place were total failures last year, and the two industrious young fellows who own the farm got hard pushed and discouraged. So I lent them money, and helped them get credit by speaking a good word for them to other people. That's a kind of thing I feel some satisfaction in doing. There was another case lately where I thought assistance was deserved. A young man who was a neighbor's coachman wanted to buy some land on which to build a home. He came to me, and I bought the land and arranged with him to pay me for it gradually."

When we saw some chickadees on our walk, Burroughs at once began to talk about them. The sight of birds or their nests, or the hearing any sounds the birds might utter always made an instant impression on him, no matter how he was engaged, and he was likely to make some comment. We passed a schoolhouse where he said a "pretty schoolma'am" taught. He often made slightly sentimental remarks about young women — the result of habit, I suppose.

Most of our day was spent in a low bark-covered one-room study adjoining the summer-house. On its north side were hung two sections of small trees, each of which had a woodpecker's hole in it. A piece of meat as large as one's fist was nailed to a maple tree before the door for the benefit of the birds.



Inside of the study the most conspicuous feature was the fireplace. At the opposite end was a bay window, near the upper part of which was suspended a large pane of blue glass. "I hung that glass there for decorative effect," Burroughs explained. "It's something my wife had put in her bedroom window at the time of the blue-glass health-craze."

The room contained a lounge and several old chairs and three tables. The comfort of one of the chairs was increased by having what looked like the faded remnant of an ancient quilt thrown over its back, and this was tied in place with a string. A big table in the center of the room was Burroughs's writing-place. It was strewn with papers, letters, books, and odds and ends. Underneath was a waste-basket overflowing with paper scraps. The shelves around the walls were crammed with books and magazines.

"I like to sit here evenings and look into the fire," my companion remarked.

We talked again of his experience as a country boy, and he said:

"All of us children at the old farm helped with the work. I'm afraid I was n't as good a worker as the others; but I was suited with the environment, and, though my tasks were seldom attractive, I was a healthy lad, and, as a rule, contented and cheerful, and I appreciated the many opportunities the farm



*The Stone House built in 1873*



*Mr. and Mrs. Burroughs at the Riverby Well*

afforded for pleasure. I did all the work that came to me — yes, and was glad to do it. Even spreading manure, which was heavy work that I decidedly did n't like, is fragrant in my memory now. We did it in the spring when the grass was starting and the birds were returning and the hills had a wistful look.

“But I did n't knowingly observe these accessories. The subconscious self does a great deal for me. It's like a net hidden under the waters, and it has caught many things of which I was not aware at the time. I never thought about the views on which I looked, and it was only when I gazed on the same scenes in maturer life that I would say, ‘How beautiful and grand this is!’

“Of course the spectacular things in nature, such as an unusually brilliant sunset, a rainbow, or a thunder-storm, impressed me as they would any boy. Yet though the quiet things do not consciously appeal to a boy, his mind is plastic and they leave their stamp on him. My very being was woven out of those early scenes and forces. Every boy who has any sensitiveness at all has something inherent in him to receive those impressions, but it mostly depends on later experience, thinking, and acquaintance with literature to bring them to the surface. Otherwise it is only the practical side of things, not the idealistic side, that appeals to him.

“Aside from the unconscious influence of nature,



the farm is valuable to the boy in the training it gives him. He has to get right down to fundamentals, and is moulded by them in a way that helps him all his days. In the big cities most of the active business men — those who put things through — are from the farm. The human output of the farm is good hickory timber. Farm-work is varied and full of emergencies and problems. There's a constant necessity for planning and adjusting which develops generalship. That's a quality the successful man behind the plough must have, just as much as the successful leader on the battle-field, to deal with conditions that are often difficult and puzzling.

"I liked to help pick apples and store them in the cellar and in the back-yard apple-hole. Sugar-making was also a pleasure. It took me into the woods, and all its associations appealed to me. I used to run up the hill back of the house to the sunny border of our sap bush in the first warm days of spring and tap four or five trees on my own account a week or so ahead of the general tapping. I would lug the sap down regularly, and, amid the protests of the women-folks, make a place for a kettleful on the kitchen stove.

"Finally I'd have a sugaring-off and mould the sugar into little scalloped cakes, which I put in a basket and peddled in the village. No one else made such white sugar or got it to market so early. I sold the cakes at two cents apiece, and the money had



value that no money has had since. Money I get now does n't stick to my fingers as that did. Oh, how I wish I could get some that would give me the same delight! I know I had three dollars in silver quarters one spring, and I was the envy of every boy in town. I had charm, I had power. I used to carry the sugar money around a month or two till the novelty wore off before I began to spend it. I bought my first grammar, first algebra, and other school-books with that money.

"We had cows and a flock of sheep, and much of the care of these creatures fell on me. If I made any complaint about the task, father would say: 'Yes, it's "Come, John," and it's "Go, John"; John is dog, fence, and pastur'."

"I had quite a reputation for expertness in throwing stones. One day I saw a bull bellowing at me from a field, and I said, 'That bull and I are going to have this thing out.'

"So I selected a lot of pebbles of the right size and got over into the field, but I took care not to venture far from the stone wall. My first shot took the bull on the tip of one of his horns, just where I intended it should. That's a very sensitive spot. You could see him cringe. Oh, how it hurt! I threw four times, and every shot told, but the bull did n't give in. I knew if those were n't enough for him, he was going to have the best of it, and I edged along to the stone wall and skipped over. Then the bull came and

snorted and pawed up the earth and showed how he'd make mince-meat of me if I went back there.

"A sheep that shows fight you can manage very well. When a buck starts for you, just wait till he almost gets to you, then step to one side and grab him by his fleece. We had a buck on my father's farm that was always charging us. He'd put his head down and come for me like a catapult. 'T would have knocked me into the middle of next week if I'd been hit. But I'd always step to one side, get a grip on his wool, jump on his back, and ride him all round the pasture; or I'd catch him by the legs, trip him up — anything. He did n't get any wiser by it, though. He got uglier, and I had to stop.

"I never had anything to do with horses as a boy. I was n't skillful with them. All my brothers had colts, but I took more to cows, and I had to drive the oxen. I remember how I harrowed a field with some steers. Every now and then they would get tired of the job and start for home with the heavy drag at their heels, and I would cut cross-lots to the bars with my whip, ready to say, 'Whoa, back!' when they came along. I'd turn 'em round and resume the harrowing, but pretty soon off they'd go again as tight as they could run. My father was an expert ox-driver. I was n't. I did n't make noise enough, but you could hear him three miles hollering at the oxen as he drove them.

"Mowing was one of the few farm jobs in which I excelled. We cut all the grass with scythes and I took pride in my ability to keep up with any of the other mowers. The older mowers would start in and take a gait, and I would follow them closely, swinging my scythe with such ardor that by noon my knees would be trembling with the strain. No doubt this exertion was sometimes to my injury. The undelightful part of haying was the grindstone. I had to turn. I used to think it would be fun to hold the scythe and see the stone eat away at the edge, but to turn for some one else to grind was a weariness.

"Sunday is linked with some of the pleasantest of my youthful recollections. We boys used to look upon it as a holiday — a day when we would have some fun. We'd climb the hills or we'd put in the day swimming and following along the streams. We'd go wintergreening and blackberrying, and we'd crawl about the rocks and ledges. My people were church people, but if we behaved ourselves and were on hand at mealtime they did n't object to our rambling. There was no arbitrary restraint.

"Yes, Sunday was always a cheerful spot in the week. In my memory the sun never failed to shine on that day. There were no storm-clouds nor shadows. It was truly a Sun-day — a day of the sun.

"On those boyhood Sundays I carried a fishline

in my pocket and I'd cut a pole in the woodland. Sometimes I returned with fish and sometimes not. Father disapproved of the Sunday fishing, but he was human, and if I brought home several nice trout his reprimand was n't severe. The trout appealed to him, and he never refused them as tainted flesh. He was n't so particular as some persons are about Rockefeller's money.

"The girls were much more apt to go to church than we boys were. But we were never bad in our inclinations, and there was no rowdiness in our Sunday pursuits. When we got older and were interested in dress and in seeing people we began to be churchgoers too.

"From childhood I have been a haunter of rocks. My old home was in a region of rocks, and the ledges jutting out from the sides of the hills and mountains always attracted me by reason of the great age that their gray and crumbling fronts proclaimed. There they stood, and you could see eternity, almost, written in their eroded forms. I liked to sit in their shallow coves, and I would fancy that the Indians had been under there, as no doubt they had. One impressive contrast was furnished by the fact that among those scarred cliffs the phoebe-birds had for untold centuries built their mossy nests and laid their pearl-white eggs.

"I had a mechanical turn and was very good at making bows and arrows, and crossguns, wheel-



barrows, and sleds. With my crossguns I used to hunt the chipmunks that dug up our corn. The chipmunks were much more abundant then than now. They were usually pretty hard put to it for food at the beginning of summer, and when the corn was an inch or two high they would occasionally raid the rows near the stone walls.

"I must have been about ten years old when I began to hunt with a gun. We had an old-fashioned flintlock musket. Father would load it for me with small gravel stones and send me forth to shoot the chipmunks around the corn. I liked that, and away I'd tramp to spend a couple of hours or so making war on the depredators.

"Sometimes the gun would go off, and sometimes it would n't. You could n't do anything with it on a damp day. Even on a dry day you could n't be certain but that it would flash in the pan. Clink! the old gun would go, and you'd get a little puff of smoke in your face, and that was all. It was very apt to hang fire. Perhaps the flint was worn and you'd take it out and change ends, or pick a fresh edge on it with your knife. We bought the flints at the village store, two for a penny.

"My great ambition as a hunter was to kill a partridge. They're most difficult creatures to shoot, you know. Soon after I was allowed to use the old musket, I started out with it after partridges. Sure enough, when I got to the woods, I found one of the



birds I was seeking. I can see now exactly how it looked as it stood there on the ground, spreading its tail and twitting, twitting, just as a partridge will.

“I was n’t strong enough to hold my gun straight out and fire. I was obliged to rest it on a twig of a convenient tree, and it was such a rusty old thing that I had to use all my strength to pull the trigger. I took good aim at the partridge, but when I pulled, the twig broke, and down went the muzzle of the gun into the ground. However, the trigger did n’t quite get to the snapping point, and that gave me a chance to try again.

“For a wonder the partridge did n’t leave. It was the most accommodating bird I’ve met in all my travels. It simply flew up into a small tree and walked back and forth on a branch and twitted at me as if it were saying, ‘I’ll give you plenty of time, little boy.’

“Presently I got a sight on it again, and I pulled and pulled on the trigger till ‘Whang!’ went the old gun, and there was the partridge fluttering on the ground. I felt no pity for the bird. Like all country boys I was glad to see it flutter there in its death agony. Oh, boys are savages! They don’t dread to shed blood. They delight in it.

“I started for home in great triumph — not that my ambition as a sportsman was satisfied, but I had to go to the house to get the gun loaded. Father put in another charge and I hastened back to the

woods. Pretty soon I heard a great cawing there among the crows. I knew something was up, and I went to see what the matter was.

“At my approach the crows flew away, and I stopped close by a big hollow stump and looked around. I did n’t make out what the trouble had been until an enormous owl came up out of the stump and turned his great staring eyes toward me. He fairly made me jump. It was my first experience of that sort. Those eyes and the bird’s deliberate motions and his wonderfully wise and profound air were very impressive.

“After a few moments the owl flew up in a tree, and bent his gaze down on me, apparently wondering what that little boy was doing with a gun. As soon as I could collect my wits, I got the old musket up against a tree-trunk, aimed at those big eyes, and down came the owl. I was greatly elated to think that I’d killed such a noble creature as a hoot owl, and I carried him off home as triumphantly as I had the partridge.

“Woodchucks were a pest on the farm then and they are yet. Sometimes I went after them with the gun and sometimes I made war on them aided by our dog.

“They used to have shooting-matches in those days. Each autumn a lot of the young fellows in town would choose sides, eight or ten on a side, and within a certain limited period would kill all they

could of the game creatures and such animals as were considered enemies of the farmers. On the final day the two parties met at a hotel to count their game and have supper. The supper was paid for by the side that got beaten.

“They counted the game in something this way: A chipmunk’s tail, one; a woodchuck’s tail, six; head of an owl or a hawk, five; head of a crow, three; and so on. By means of those hunts the smaller wild creatures were destroyed in great numbers, and they have never recovered from the blow.

“There was one season when a fellow had me shoot for him. He promised to give me some powder and shot in payment, and he owes that powder and shot to me yet. Probably I shot as many as a hundred creatures for him. I got six owls for him in a single day. It was our dog who found these owls. I heard him barking up in the woods, and I hurried with the old gun to see what he was making a row about. There sat the owls, six of them, on a limb just beyond the reach of the dog, and I got them all.

“Toward the end of April the partridges would begin to drum. I wanted to see how they did it, and one day, when I was rambling in the woods and heard a bird drumming, I tried to steal close enough to get a good look without alarming the drummer. I crept and crept along till I almost wore my pants out, and just as I got within a rod of the bird, it poked its head up over the log it was behind, and

laughed at me — ‘He, he, he!’ as much as to say, ‘Go home now, little boy, you’ve seen a partridge.’

“I don’t know how the creature heard me. I did n’t crack a twig or make a sound. Perhaps it smelled me. I was disappointed, but I said, ‘I’ll see you yet,’ and I’ve seen partridges drum a number of times since.

“People used to think that the bird beat its wings on a log or hit them together over its back. What it really does is to inflate its breast and thump on that faster and faster till the sound runs into a low roll. It is a call to the female — the partridge’s way of wooing. As he drums he stands very straight and struts about with his tail widespread dragging on the ground.

“As far as birds and nature are concerned, I was no different as a boy from the other farmboys who were my companions. Yet I was rather a keen observer, I think. I’ve known about the common animals pretty well from the time I was a child. My sensibilities as a youth were probably sharper than those of most boys. Things defined themselves to me from childhood rather clearly and accurately, and I have a more vivid memory of youthful things than the average person I talk with.

“But my early observing was all by chance, and I knew only the common birds like the robin and phœbe, the ‘black chipping-bird,’ as we called the snowbird, the song sparrow and birds of its kind,



which were known to us as 'ground birds,' and such others of the feathered folk as are strongly marked and frequently seen.

"I seldom molested them, and yet I used to join my boy friends in hanging up young birds by the legs and stoning them. The cruelty of boys is something amazing. They will murder all sorts of creatures without a pang. But they are mostly unthinking in their cruelty, and what they do in this respect is merely representative of the early instincts of the race. It's the outcropping of the traits of our remote ancestors. It's just the same as it is with certain young birds which have speckled breasts because their progenitors of ancient times had them.

"Yes, the boys' cruelty is a survival of the early struggle of the race when men had to kill. They seem to take a savage glee in destruction, and I had the common cruelty of youth. I did things that would almost make your hair stand on end to hear of. Once I threw a stone and killed a bird. There was this live thing with wings on a fence, and I let fly the stone, and down fell the bird dead. 'I did n't think I'd hit it,' I said, and I was filled with remorse.

"I get more tender-hearted as I grow older. I may come to the point where I can't even chop off the head of a chicken. Once I never saw a chipmunk but that I threw a stone at him. Now, when I see one, I always want to salute him, and say: 'Good-morning!



Come home with me and I'll give you a kernel of corn.'

"I was n't much of a hand for pets as a boy. We had dogs, of course, on the farm, and I had a cow I called my own, just as each of the other children did. I tried to tame crows and robins, but something always befell them. They died or got away. I never have had much pleasure in caged things anyway, nor, strange to say, in cultivated flowers. It's the wild creatures that I enjoy. If I had a canary I'd have to let it loose, I suppose. It seems to be distasteful to me to see wild things caged. I've had caged birds offered me — an English skylark and several native birds — but I've never accepted them.

"There were trout streams in every valley in the vicinity of my old home, and they lured me on many an expedition with my fishpole into the woods and among the rocks. But a meadow brook was my favorite fishing-place, for it was there that the trout were most numerous. Sometimes I fished in winter through the ice, hooking up suckers. One winter day when I'd gone to school and was out at recess, a sleigh came along with three or four men in it. They were neighbors I knew, and they said to me: 'We're going fishing. Do you want to go with us?'

"So I jumped on behind, and we drove down to the river. We selected a pool and cut several holes in the ice. A man would lie down at a hole with his face close to the water, and by using a straight staff

with a hook of wire loops at the end he'd pull out the fish. Some of the men went upstream and hammered with their axes on the ice to drive the fish down, and I stood at the lower end of the pool working a long pole through a hole to keep the fish from escaping in that direction. The men would hook up the suckers just as fast! and the ice was soon all alive with captured fish, which in a little while froze stiff as pokers.

"When the sport was over, they divided the fish in piles, a pile for each man who took part in the expedition. They dropped one fish at a time in turn on the piles, and then drew cuts for a choice of these piles. The piles were very much alike, but one might have an extra large fish in it, or perhaps there'd be a trout among the suckers. The men did n't count me in when they made the division, but at the end they said: 'There's Johnny. We ought to give him some.' And each man gave me a fish or two from his pile.

"I suppose I ran away from school to go fishing that time, but I don't think I was reprov'd much for it. Probably I did n't do such a thing often. If I had I'd have been hauled up for it next day by the teacher.

"When I carried home fish that had been caught in cold winter weather, they might be frozen stiff, but if I put them in water the suckers and bull-heads would thaw out and come to life and be none

the worse for their freezing. The trout, though, had a more delicate organization, and they would n't revive.

"Ants and some other insects don't seem to be harmed by freezing. I've found ants frozen — there'd be frost inside of 'em — but no sooner had they thawed than they'd run around as lively as ever. I don't suppose bees are killed in winter by freezing. They starve to death. Of course they don't need much food when they are half torpid and inactive, but they must have a little food to keep going.

"Father took a load of butter to the town of Catskill down by the Hudson River every November, and one of us boys would go along with him to see the world. The round trip was not far from one hundred miles, and it usually occupied four days. We could n't afford to buy grub along the way, and we carried enough provisions to last the whole journey. I remember perfectly well the box the food was put in. It was big and round like a cheese. Mother packed it with bread and butter, meat, beans, gingerbread, and maple-sugar cake.

"My first trip to Catskill was made when I was about ten years old. I recall one harassing experience on the way. It was early morning and we were getting ready to continue our journey after stopping at a hotel overnight. We had hitched the horses to the wagon and I'd climbed up on the load of butter,

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when father called the hotel landlord's attention to me. 'I've got a pretty smart boy there,' he said.

"To prove it he handed me the reins and told me to drive out of the barn. I started the horses, but in the doorway I miscalculated and let a hub strike, and there I stuck. How my performance did rile father! — 'Could n't drive a team out of a great door like that!'

"Catskill seemed to my eyes a big city. Never before had I got a glimpse of the outside world. I saw the Hudson and I saw a steamboat, and I saw a railway train, though it was far off across the river. When I returned I felt that I was a great traveler, and I found I had acquired increased importance among my schoolmates. They all thought they would like to take such a trip.

"Another event that made a deep impression on me was the moving of the farmhouse when I was about thirteen. We pried it up and underneath put runners that consisted of two long straight tree-trunks, and these rested on skids made of green poles. All the neighbors came to help and brought their oxen. Heavy log chains were attached, and eight or ten yoke of oxen were hitched to each runner; and such a bellowing, hawing and geeing, and whip-cracking I've never heard on any other occasion in my life. It took some time to get all those oxen to pull together, and when they did get started, how they did hump up! We broke three or four chains



that day, but we would double 'em — fix 'em some way — and go on. The building was dragged back into the orchard, and a new house was erected where the one in which I was born had stood. The latter has long since disappeared.

“I early developed a fondness for the girls. My first sweetheart lived in a little red house on the road to the West Settlement schoolhouse. She was my playmate. I recall that I went over to her house once with father when I was a little fellow. He took his oxen and was going to spend the day working there. ‘You can go along and play with Eleanor,’ he said.

“Mother thought she'd be in school, and when we got there, sure enough, Eleanor had gone to school. But her father lifted up his voice and called to her. He had a tremendous voice. The schoolhouse was half a mile away, and I don't know how she heard, but she did. Pretty soon she came running up the road wearing her pink sunbonnet, and we played together all day.

“She continued to be the girl I was fondest of up to the time I was thirteen or fourteen, though there was one other girl I had a special fancy for in the same period. But this second girl quickly alienated my affection by exposing a misdemeanor of mine to the teacher one day. She said, ‘Johnny Burroughs put his feet on the desk.’

“Her words hurt my feelings dreadfully. How could that girl, of all girls, be so hard-hearted? Afterward there was a coolness between us.



"Cider apple-sass was a great institution in those days. We used to cook a great lot of apples for sass every fall, and we boiled down cider for flavoring them in a big kettle out in the yard.

"Dried apples was another thing that people prepared in generous quantities. Often there'd be parties to get the apples ready for drying. When a family was going to have an apple-cut, they sent one of the boys round the neighborhood to say they'd like to have the young people come on such and such a night. We would arrive about seven o'clock, and the young fellows would hang up their hats in the kitchen, and the girls would put their things in the bedroom on the bed. Then we'd get to work.

"The parers sat in the center of the room. They had brought their paring-machines with them. Each machine was fastened to a board which the parer placed on a chair and then sat on to hold the machine steady. An apple was put on a prong of the machine, and the parer turned the crank and made the apple revolve against a knife he held in his hand. The apples were brought into the kitchen in big bushel baskets, and sometimes there was great rivalry as to which machine could do a basketful first. The apples, when pared, were put in pans and passed to the rest of the company sitting around the borders of the room. Some quartered and cored them, and others would string them ready for drying.

"The crowd would be talking and laughing mean-

while, and jokes would be flying across the room. Often there were other things flying too. Suppose a bashful fellow liked a girl on the opposite side of the kitchen — he very likely was n't too bashful to throw an apple-core at her. If she was friendly toward him, she would smile and look sweetly at him out of the corner of her eyes. If she did n't like him, she would scowl.

“We cut two hours till nine o'clock. Then the apples were taken away, the room was swept up, and the boys stepped outdoors and gathered in knots to stretch and air themselves. But after a little we all got together in the kitchen again for refreshments. We always had apple-pie, pumpkin-pie, and two kinds of cake. We'd sit down around the room, and those who served the food would keep bringing in the plates and platters till we were all served.

“After we'd eaten, the amusements would begin. Sometimes we had dancing, but not much, because dancing was considered extreme, and the old people rather frowned on it. We generally had those sentimental plays, you know, that used to be so common. For example, there was ‘Button, button,’— the silliest thing! You had to guess who had the button, and if you did n't guess right, the one you thought had it was asked, ‘What must this person do for accusing you so wrongfully?’

“In answer, you were ordered to pay some forfeit, and the forfeit always had kissing in it.

“So we went on with ‘Button, button,’ and ‘Blindman’s buff,’ and one game and another for about an hour. Then the girls would begin to get their things, and the boys would loiter near the door, each one waiting for his victim — the right one — to emerge. They accompanied the girls to their home gates, said, ‘Good-night,’ and separated.

“I went to my first apple-cut when I was just on the edge of the awkward age that lasts from fourteen to eighteen. I did my part with the others until the work and the fun were over and it was in order for the boys to go home with the girls they took a shine to. The boys had been at me all the evening about Eleanor, asking if I was going home with her. I wanted to, but when the time came, there were the boys and girls all standing around to see who was going with who, and I had n’t the courage.

“The proper thing would have been to sidle up to Eleanor and say, ‘May I have the pleasure of your company home this evening?’

“That was a good deal of a choker for a fellow of fourteen. If you were the one the girl fancied, she’d take your arm and off you’d go. If she liked some other fellow better, she’d say, ‘I beg to be excused’ — at least that was the polite formula, but I suppose the girl would very often bluntly say ‘No.’ In that case you got the ‘mitten’ as they called it.

“Eleanor’s brother Jim went with my sister Jane. The young fellows had been plaguing him about

her, same as they'd been at me, but he was sixteen or over and not so easily frightened as I was, and their joking did n't prevent his seeing her home. Eleanor had to go off without me, and, to explain my delinquency, I told the boys I was n't going way off down there to her house in the cold and dark. We sort of grew apart after that, and presently another fellow turned his attention to her."

When this winter visit of mine came to an end, I crossed the river to go to the railroad station, and Burroughs went over with me and carried half my belongings.



### III

*February, 1895*

#### THE FAULTS OF A CITY

I MET Burroughs by appointment one morning at a publisher's in New York, and observed with interest that he had come to the metropolis wearing a dark-gray woolen shirt. He carried an old leather handbag, much worn and battered, in which he said he had a manuscript or two.

We called together later at the offices of the "Century Magazine," and one of the editors blew Burroughs a kiss the moment he appeared. They all seemed very fond of him.

Toward one o'clock he declared that he was hungry and piloted me to a Union Square restaurant. "I know this place," he said. "It's not stylish nor expensive and the food tastes good."

As we were waiting to be served, he remarked that he was quite muscular, and had me reach across the table and feel his biceps while he doubled up his arm. Whatever he chose from the menu I ordered also, and what I chose he ordered. "It's plain that we could live together," he commented. "I'm going to be here all the week, and I wish you were going to be here too. We'd have a good time together. Well,



you must come up to my place in April and we will have some fun there.

“Before my beard whitened, the bunco-steerers in New York used to get after me. I suppose they knew well enough just by looking at me that I was from the country. There was only once I lost anything by their operations. I was young then, but I ought to have known better. I went into an auction room and bid off a watch. The watch was worthless, and I was out the ten dollars I paid for it. Another time two men wanted me to come with them and make a deal on very favorable terms for pasturing a horse of theirs, but I would have nothing to do with them.

“I don’t stay in New York any longer than I have to. I don’t like the city noise and dirt. My lungs are filled with dust already. I like the smell of oxen, if I don’t get too much of it. I’ve been breaking out roads with oxen the past week.

“When I visit New York, not only is my nose outraged, but my ears are stunned and my eyes are confused. I can’t stay a week in any city without longing for the green fields and the woods. Living in one would never do for me. Everybody you see there is rushing about in a great hurry, and you are amid a perfectly senseless uproar. I’m impressed every time I visit a large place with the discord of its noise.

“I can’t conceive how a poet can live in a city, but

of course poets have done so, and very likely more will in the future. This is an age of concentration. The towns are all the time growing larger, and wealth gets to an increasing degree into the hands of the few. The decentralizing tendency of the Middle Ages will never come again. The love of nature will send more people to the country than it has in the past, but no great current will turn in that direction. The mass of men don't like the country solitude. They are drawn by the greater variety of the city — and the city does get more out of a man. It is a big stimulus, but it kills him far sooner than the country would.

“Country sounds mean something. I like to hear the cows low, or the crowing of the roosters. The bleating of calves is delightful, and the voice of the pasturing sheep is one of the most charming of sounds. It is the call of the mountains. No city sound at all approaches it in beauty. No chime of bells anywhere is to be compared with the bleat of the sheep on a summer evening.

“Nearly all country sounds are agreeable. Even the rattling of a team along a dirt road has a pleasant flavor and awakens interest. Still we have to make some exceptions. I can't say that I like to hear a guinea-hen or the bray of a donkey or the voice of a peacock. Nature gave the peacock that splendid tail, but offset it with that dreadful voice.”

## IV

*April, 1895*

### SCHOOLDAYS

I REACHED Riverby late in the morning, and after eating a shad dinner at Burroughs's home went off with him to the wooded hillsides west of the village. In a piece of swampy meadow-land we found the skunk-cabbage blossoms thrusting up from the soggy soil, and he picked one, broke off the earlike sheath to have a look inside, and sniffed it to see how bad it smelled.

On the borders of some deep woods was a mossy little house under a group of great hemlocks. "It's falling to pieces now," Burroughs said, "but a few years ago a family lived there. I used to see the only child of the household pass on her way to and from school. She was 'sweet sixteen,' and a very pretty modest girl with pink in her cheeks. But perhaps the pink was not the flush of health, for she soon died of consumption."

He had a greeting for every one we met, particularly for the children. He always spoke to the dogs and occasionally stooped to pet them and converse in joking detail, and they responded in a way that made evident a friendly feeling that was mutual.

Toward night we returned to Riverby. A number

of beehives were scattered about on the grounds, but Burroughs said most of the bees had been winter-killed. He rapped on the hives experimentally and poked some of the dead bees out at the entrance. One hive he tipped up and looked under.

We had supper and were going to the bark-covered study to spend the evening when we met Julian with his gun and game-basket returning from an all-day solitary hunting excursion. The only game he had secured was one duck, and he was footsore, but he was enthusiastic over his experiences.

The next morning, soon after six, Burroughs roused me with a summons to breakfast by calling from the furnace in the basement. His voice came up through the register. After breakfast Mrs. Burroughs showed me her best curtains and upholstered furniture.

The day was rainy, and Burroughs and I presently adjourned to the study. A gray cat was hanging about, and while he was poking the fire she jumped on his back. When he sat down she settled herself in his lap. "She's a strange cat that came to us," he said. "She looked hunted and wild at first, but now she's quite domestic. I talk to her a great deal."

On the fireplace mantel was a little red devil with a wooden bucket at his side. A rubber band was hooked over a horn and extended down to his right hand. "I put the band there," Burroughs told me, "but the little devil and the bucket were a present



from two young women who visited me last fall. The flies bothered me a good deal then, and I used to snap at them with a rubber band. It would knock them into smithereens. The girls saw my cruelty, and they brought the devil-guarded bucket to put my victims in."

"I wish you'd tell me something about the schools you attended," I said, and his response to this and other questions was:

"I remember the first day I went to school. I could n't have been more than four or five years old, and the mile or so I had to travel was my first great journey. I wore a suit my mother had made. It was a little cotton suit, striped blue and white, and it had flaps on the shoulders that went up and down like a dog's ears, if I ran.

"Olly Ann, my oldest sister, led me by the hand down the Hardscrabble road easterly to the 'Old Stone Jug,' as the schoolhouse was called. Its walls were of rough unhewn stone, and their aspect was the same in the schoolroom as outside, except for a coat of whitewash. The seats seemed very high. The one that some of us smaller ones sat on was just a slab from the sawmill, flat side up, with widely slanting legs inserted underneath. I could n't touch my feet to the floor from it. One day I went to sleep and fell over backward against the rough wall, and knocked a great hole in my head. The next thing I knew I was lying in a house that was near the school,

and there was a smell of camphor in the air. I don't remember how I got home, but I must have got there some way.

"The memory of many things connected with those far-away schooldays continues amazingly vivid. If I go into a schoolhouse now, I get the same odor I did in the first school I attended in the Catskills. It takes me right back there among my old-time schoolmates.

"I learned my alphabet in Cobb's Spelling-Book. It was arranged with the vowels first and then the consonants. The teachers had the most mechanical way of drilling that alphabet into the children. I was months learning it. The schoolmaster called me up three or four times a day and pointed out the letters one by one with a penknife, skipping up and down the columns at random. 'What letter's that?' he would ask each time he pointed.

"Hen Meeker sat next to me. He was older and larger than I was, and I recall that once, when the teacher had him at his side saying the letters, Hen came to small c, and could n't tell what it was. The master kept at him, but there Hen stuck at the c.

" 'Why,' the schoolmaster said, 'I'll bet little Johnny Burroughs can tell that letter.'

"So he had me come and look at it, and I said 'c,' and was very proud of my knowledge.

"I was the only one of our family that 'took to larnin',' as my father would say, and I don't think

I hankered after the studying much. The days in school were very long, but we had royal fun in play-time. We played tag, and we played 'den,' which was a kind of racing game, and we played ball; yes, and we could have fun out of nothing in those days.

"Children have nimble brains. How easily their imaginations are kindled! I remember in particular one noon at school there was a very curious demonstration of the power of youthful fancy. All the larger schoolgirls were thrown into a great state of alarm because they thought the end of the world was coming. They wept and wailed, and I was scared with the rest. A thunder-storm was rising over the hills, and the black clouds looked very portentous. I realized that, and I expected everything was going to collapse, though I had no notion just what the end of the world meant.

"Of course the storm passed away, the trumpets were not sounded, and we went back into the school-house thinking the event had been postponed — that it was n't to come off till the next day, or the day after, or some other day. It had missed fire, anyway. I don't know how the girls got their idea. There were no grown people in the neighborhood who were looking for the end of the world. Perhaps the girls might have seen an item of the sort in the newspapers, for it was about the time that the Millerite excitement swept over the country and believing Adventists had prepared their ascension

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robes. But, wherever the idea came from, there those big girls and the rest of us stood in the schoolyard watching anxiously to see everything go.

"After two summers at the Old Stone Jug I went to a school in the opposite direction in the West Settlement. The school building was a little gray unpainted wooden affair toeing on the highway down by a brook. There was a continuous desk against the schoolroom wall, and a backless seat to match, and we little ones had three long benches in the open space, arranged to form three sides of a square. A big box stove stood in the center of the room.

"I used to amuse myself, when the teacher was n't looking, by slipping round on the line of seats. How could a little boy sit still all those long hours? There could n't have been many small children, for I remember slipping clear round. I suppose I'd skip over the others. If the teacher looked, I'd stay still, but as soon as he turned away I'd begin to slide again.

"We had the first blackboard I ever saw in that schoolhouse, and it was quite an innovation for the Catskills. It made us feel that our school was picking up. The material was wood painted black. It was about three feet high and four feet long, and was fastened up near the door. Several of the big boys studied algebra — something I'd never heard of before — and they did their problems on that blackboard. What a mystery it was — the  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , and the



plus and minus they used! I would draw a deep breath and wonder whether I could ever master a thing like that.

“The schoolhouse by the brook was presently abandoned, and we went to a new clapboarded building painted red, on higher ground not far away. That is still the schoolhouse for the district. There was a noon-mark cut in a window-sill, and we got very restive if we were not dismissed the moment the sun got to that mark.

“If we followed the road, the schoolhouse was two miles from my home; but there was a short-cut, though I seldom took advantage of it at first because it passed through a patch of woods, and I was afraid. I had plenty of time then. A cousin went with me, and in winter some of the older children. We used to start by half-past seven o'clock, so as to have ample opportunity to loiter and play. I got to know every inch of the road between home and school and had many little adventures all along it with one thing and another.

“Once in a while we ventured through the woods on a summer morning and stopped by a spring there to get crinkle-root, which we liked to carry to eat with our dinners. It's a kind of cress — an appetizing thing, almost as strong as horse-radish. In the deepest, dampest spot in the woods, near that spring run, we would see those ghostly insects — I hardly know what you call them — that collect in masses

on the branches of trees. They are white as snow, and very fuzzy, with a long down on them. They'd collect in a ropy mass bigger'n your fist strung along a branch, and they would stir with a rhythmic pulsation that filled us with a sort of dread. You see we did n't know what they were. Sometimes we'd hit the branch a rap, and that would make them come stringing down. Then we'd run.

"The short-cut saved a mile. If I went to school that way, I soon left the road and followed a footpath through a meadow and a piece of woodland and a pasture, passed over the brook on a stout slab, and went on through more meadow and a neglected orchard to the highway near the school.

"For our dinner we carried rye bread and butter, pie, and cake, and our pockets full of apples. In the long noontime, after we'd emptied our dinner-baskets, we boys would go to the brook, and perhaps have a swim in the swimming-hole.

"Sometimes we'd fish for trout. To do that we'd roll up our pants the whole length of our legs, and our sleeves way up to our shoulders, and then we'd wade in and reach for the trout with our hands under the bank. Once in a while we'd get hold of one and capture it, but oftener we'd feel their slippery forms glide through our fingers. The trout swam under the bank to hide from us. Occasionally they'd seek shelter in a hole like a sack, and you'd see a tail sticking out. Then we'd run our fingers beneath

the trout and slide 'em very carefully along toward its head, tickling it at the same time. If you were gentle, the trout would stay perfectly still, as if it actually enjoyed being tickled. They fish that way in England, I believe. When we'd slid our fingers along far enough, we'd nip the fish right behind the gills and toss it out.

"We used to get well spattered in this paddling in the water, but we did n't mind that. A wetting was nothing in summer. But I had an experience with the brook when I was on the way to school one winter morning that was n't so pleasant. We were having a freshet, and the stream was very full. The slab we usually walked across on had been washed away. That did n't prevent the older children from jumping across all right, but when I tried, in I went, kersouse!—right under water. I scrambled out quickly enough and went along to school. There I pulled off my boots and poured the water out. The teacher let me stand by the stove most of the day, and, strange to say, I did n't take cold.

"Now and then we school children would play hooky and make a trip down to Stratton Falls, a mile and a half distant, after slate to use in making slate-pencils. It was a place where there were high ledges, and a horseshoe fall of water that you could get in behind, and we liked to hang around there and play. We would run away at noon and not get back until long after school had begun. Our excuse was that we

had to go to get slate-pencils. It was a great adventure. Streaks of slate cropped out in the ledges and we used to get little slabs of that slate and carry them home. Some of it was red and some blue. The way to tell if the slate would do for pencils was to rub it across the ends of your under teeth. You knew instantly by the grit if it was too hard or too soft.

“We took the little slabs of slate home, and in our spare time would work them up into slate-pencils. I’d cut with my knife two straight deep gashes on one side about a quarter of an inch apart, drawing the knife back and forth and back and forth by the hour. Then I’d turn the slab over and start other cuts to meet the first ones. By and by you broke off the slab along the gashes, and then you could whittle your piece of slate into shape. We got all our slate-pencils in that way. You could n’t buy them at the store. I never heard of such a thing as buying slate-pencils when I was a boy.

“We children did n’t pay much attention to flowers. It is n’t a country that abounds with wild flowers, but there were plenty of violets. We gathered those — chiefly, though, to ‘fight roosters’ with them. The way we did that was for two of us to each take a violet and hook them together and see which fellow’s would pull the other’s head off — see which violet would stand the most strain.

“One of my schoolmates was Jay Gould. He sat right behind me, and we were quite chums. He was



a small wiry fellow, aristocratic in his feelings, and not inclined to mix much with the rest of the farm-boys. I remember very well his superior, scornful laugh. He was clever and quick and a good student, and he easily stood at the head in his classes.

“At one time a boy came from another town and inoculated the whole school with a mania for wrestling. Jay did n’t like our rough-and-tumble sports and kept out of them for the most part, but he used to wrestle with me. We were about of an age, and very evenly matched, and we’d wrestle by the hour until we’d pant like dogs. I was a little more muscular and had the most science, but Jay had infinite wind and endurance. He was like a boy made of India-rubber and steel. You’d think you had him down when you had n’t, and then you’d find him on top. If he could n’t get on top any other way, he’d break his holt, which was against the rules. He was n’t very particular about rules. The one point with Jay was to get on top.

“After he left school I helped him, when he was hard up, by buying two old books of him, a German grammar and a geology. They cost me eighty cents. Jay went out into the world early and our intimacy ceased.

“By the time I reached the age of twelve, I was old enough to be a valuable helper on the farm, and after that I went to school only in winter.

“Presently a longing developed for more knowl-

edge than I could get in the district school. A neighbor's boy came home from Harpersfield Academy, a dozen miles or so away, giving such an enthusiastic account of its advantages that I wanted to go there too. I remember what rosy cheeks that boy had. He's dead long ago now. Harpersfield! Even the sound of the name was beautiful in my imagination. How I dwelt on it! Harpersfield! To me it meant a field full of men playing on harps, and there was great charm in the mental picture the idea presented.

"That was in 1853, and father promised to let me go to Harpersfield if I would take hold and work hard all the fall. I eagerly accepted the conditions, and thus it happened that I did my first and only ploughing. I tackled a big hillside field above the sap-bush. The ground had to be made ready for sowing rye, and it had been ploughed once, but needed cross-ploughing before it was sowed. I walked the furrow and drove the horses to and fro, and the visions of Harpersfield beckoned me on. I recollect perfectly those beautiful September days in that breezy uplying field with its broad view down the valley.

"I finished the ploughing and helped faithfully with the other fall work, but when the time came to go to the academy my father did n't feel that he could afford the expense. Besides, he thought it would be hardly fair to the other children, for none of them was going off to school. But then, they did n't want to go. The less schooling the better so

far as their sentiments were concerned. So I stayed at home and attended the district school again through the winter. Yet, I guess I went to Harpersfield after all, for the aspiration to go was the main thing. Indeed, though the going seemed very vital then, I dare say I've done just as well as if I'd actually gone to Harpersfield.

"In the spring I determined to earn some money myself to pay for the education I was so eager to have and I went off and got a position as a teacher. There was no occasion for spending much, and I carried home nearly the entire amount of my wages. That enabled me to pay my board and tuition for three winter months at the Hedding Literary Institute in Ashland, about fifteen miles easterly from Roxbury. The rates were very reasonable. Two and a half a week paid for board and tuition. There must have been nearly three hundred students, and they all lived in a big seminary dormitory, which was very like a factory building, bare and many-windowed without the least pretension to architectural charm. In those days such seminaries were scattered all over the State, but they've about all disappeared now.

"My studies were algebra, geometry, grammar, chemistry, French, and logic. The only study in which I excelled at Ashland was composition. I remember I stood second. First honors went to a boy who afterward became a Methodist dominie. He was n't very winning in some ways. He was very

lean physically, and very lean mentally, and he lacked oratorical gifts, but he made the best prayers I've ever heard. Finally, in his old age, he had to teach school, and he died in harness. I had a room to myself, and I found the life enjoyable and regretted that I did n't have the money to continue at Ashland longer.

"In the spring I returned to the farm, where I worked till fall. Then I took up teaching again to get funds for another period at a seminary. Late in the winter I collected my salary and immediately afterward became a student at a seminary in Cooperstown. Besides acquiring book knowledge there, I rowed on the lake, played baseball, and engaged in other sports. I took special interest in the writing of compositions, and I remember that I chose for the subject of one of them 'Goodness Essential to Greatness.'

"While I was at Cooperstown I got acquainted with a pretty black-eyed girl from Unadilla, and after I left school I corresponded with her. I think I was attracted mainly by the name of the place where she lived. Unadilla — that wild Indian name enchanted me. If it had been Oshkosh I don't believe I'd have written her. Still she was a very pretty girl. All the boys admired her, and when she appeared on the street half a dozen of us were likely to follow her about, a little behind, with our mouths watering.

"When Matthew Arnold was in this country, he



wanted to see Indianapolis. He was drawn by the name — the combination of a new world beginning and a Grecian ending. He thought that in consequence the place must have a picturesque and interesting individuality. Place names that are significant or rhythmical have always appealed to me in the same way.

“The young men at the seminaries of that period often took the notion to wear their hair long — combed straight back from the forehead and hanging down behind enough to overlap the coat-collar a trifle. It was one of the freaks of the time. I adopted the custom and continued it for a number of years. The habit was not general; but was confined to occasional youngish fellows who wished to signify to the world that they were dissatisfied with the old order of things and determined to better them. It was the mark of a come-outer — a revolutionist.

“On the Fourth of July we students all went for a picnic up on the banks of Otsego Lake, and I was one of the orators chosen for the occasion. I recall that when I spoke, I stood up under a tree with the listening girls all about. There were boys in the crowd, of course, but I was most impressed by the girls. I still have in my mind’s eye their white flounces and furbelows. I guess my oration was to the girls. It was in the patriotic vein, delivered in true spread-eagle style. Besides orating I had to respond to a toast — The Pilgrim Fathers. Neither

the responding nor the speech troubled me any. I wrote out beforehand all that I proposed to say and committed it to memory, and I spouted it fluently enough. One of my fellow-speakers on that July day afterward became an eminent lawyer in New York City. I thought him the finest boy orator I had ever known.

“My cash ran so low, as the close of the Coopers-town term approached in midsummer, that I had to send home for enough to get a new coat and vest for the last-day exercises. This was an important occasion in my eyes, and I spoke an original oration — something about nature. I went back to the home farm to spend the rest of the summer working in the hayfield. My student days were over.”

## V

*September, 1895*

### TEACHING IN THE GROPING YEARS

THE first thing Burroughs did, on the morning that I got to Riverby, was to take me down to the vineyard and make me eat cluster after cluster of grapes, and he filled my pockets with peaches.

"It's a mistake to eat the grape seeds," he said. "They're apt to make trouble in the stomach. The most delicate way to deal with grapes is to just swallow the juice and reject the rest, pulp and all. That's what I've been doing this season, and I've thrived on it. There's no virtue in the pulp, anyway."

By and by we went for a walk, and fell in with some children and a dog, who accompanied us for a while. Burroughs talked to the dog and played with him and helped him over the fences. I think, in all my acquaintance with him, he never failed to have a companionable talk with every dog he met. He was strongly inclined to speak to the animals, domestic and wild, large and small, as if they understood him, and to address them with some lively remarks.

We went up through the woods beyond the village to where Burroughs had a man at work reclaiming a swamp. He did n't see the man, but

found several fires smouldering in some nearly consumed rubbish-heaps.

"I don't want that fire to spread," Burroughs remarked.

He knew where to find a pail and he filled it at a pool and splashed the water about on the embers.

Afterward he said: "Come with me. There's a nice spring on the edge of the swamp. We'll have a drink."

He led the way to a stake on the tip of which was a rusty tin can turned bottom upward. With this receptacle he dipped up some water that was deliciously cool and pure.

In a neighboring group of rocks was a cave which he said he liked to crawl into on a hot day. This time he seated himself on a ledge at the mouth of the cave, where he looked very like an old-time hermit.

When we returned to Riverby, we picked some corn for dinner and gathered a basket of peaches. Some of the peach trees were not doing well, and Burroughs dug around the base after borers.

A flock of ducks was waddling around the out-buildings, and he fed them and gave them water. Evidently he was very fond of them. He talked with them every time he was in their vicinity, and they kept up a clatter of quacking in response.

"My wife thinks they are dirty creatures," he said. "and she often chases them away from her do-





*Packing Grapes*



*The Riverby Study*



*At Work in the Vineyard*

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main with a broom. They have come to know her as their enemy, and whenever they hear the back door of the house open, they start to run. But after going a little distance they give a backward look, and if they see a friend they call a halt. If they see Mrs. Burroughs they run faster than ever."

We went for another walk in the fields and woods late in the afternoon. A young woman who was sojourning at a neighbor's went along too, remarking rather gushingly that she felt highly honored. On a pool below a roadway culvert we saw some water-striders skating about. Burroughs wanted to examine one. So he took a stick and kept them from going under the bridge while the young woman tried to effect a capture. She made most heroic grabs and paid no attention to the spattering she gave her skirts. Finally she surprised herself and the rest of us by actually securing one of the skating insects, and we looked at it through the folding microscope that Burroughs carried in his pocket.

After we had resumed our ramble he said: "Have you noticed how scarce bluebirds are this year? Early in the season the newspapers said the bluebirds had been practically exterminated by our hard winter, and I'm afraid that's pretty near true. I saw only a pair or two of them in the spring. In August there was one solitary bird around here for several days. I suppose it had no mate. I saw a pair later. That showed they were n't all gone, so we can

hope they will increase in time to their old numbers."

On our way back he recited a considerable number of Mother Goose jingles, and remarked, "I think the old lady was a good deal of a poet."

He dwelt with especial pleasure on the verses that begin with

"There were three jolly Welshmen,  
As I have heard say,  
And they went a-hunting  
All on a summer's day.

"From morn till night they hunted,  
And nothing could they find  
But a ship a-sailing,  
A-sailing with the wind.

"One said it was a ship,  
Another said, 'Nay';  
The third said it was a house,  
With the chimney blown away."

"You have there three types of mind," Burroughs said — "first, that of the person who sees things as they are; second, that of the person who denies everything; third, that of the person who romances over what he sees, and to whom a simple natural explanation of phenomena is not satisfactory."

We were a little late to supper, and as a consequence Mrs. Burroughs was almost in a scolding mood when we appeared. But that did n't last, and as soon as we were seated at the table she called my



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attention to the bread and apologized for it at great length. "I had bad luck with it," she said. "The yeast was poor. I usually make my own yeast, but I bought what I used this time. I don't want to have you think that I can't make good bread and —"

"Oh, never mind!" Burroughs interrupted, "I don't see but that the bread is all right enough. It's a small matter, anyway."

However, it was no small matter to her (probably it would n't have been to him if the bread really had been poor), and she said all she had to say on the subject before she stopped.

Sometimes Mrs. Burroughs had a hired girl, and this was one of the times. So after supper she left the dishes for the girl to wash. Burroughs said he and I would go and sit in the little corner library, but she insisted on our spending the evening in the parlor, which she had fixed up with an elaborateness that made her feel she could be justly proud of it. The parlor could n't possibly have been cleaner or more tidy.

During this visit, with some encouragement from me in the way of questions, Burroughs again became reminiscent and told of how he taught school in his early manhood.

"It was late in March," he said, "just before I was seventeen years old, that I set forth to seek my first job as a teacher. I journeyed southeasterly forty miles or more into Ulster County. A part of the way

I walked carrying my black oilcloth satchel, but most of the distance I traveled on top of an old Concord stage-coach drawn by four horses.

“While on this trip I was in one of the tavern bar-rooms on the first day of April waiting for the stage to start, and I saw a big copper cent on the floor. I forgot it was April Fool’s Day and very innocently stooped to pick up the coin. But the cent was nailed fast, and that made all the loafers snicker and put me to confusion.

“I was hired to teach in a little red schoolhouse at the obscure hamlet of Tongore. My wages were ten dollars for the first month, and eleven afterward, and I ‘boarded round.’ I had twenty or thirty pupils. It was a big school for a crude, inexperienced youth like me to manage. I was bashful and stuttered when embarrassed. However, I had to teach only the elementary branches, and I could impart knowledge with considerable facility. I secured the good-will of my pupils and we got along very well together.

“Although I had cut loose from my father’s farm, I was still in an agricultural district, and there were mountains, high and near. The people were engaged in miscellaneous farming, instead of dairying, which, I had been used to, and I was interested in their ways of working, chiefly because these were more or less new to me. Sometimes I went out in the fields to rake, or helped in other ways.

“When a master came to a place to begin teaching,

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he was asked where he'd like to make his home, and he'd select some house where he'd leave his duds and go Saturday nights to stay over Sunday, and his washing would be done there. I chose to make my home where there were the prettiest girls. During the rest of the time I shifted from house to house among the homes of my pupils.

"I was always put in a cold bed in the spare chamber — a bare, empty room, not in the least cheerful. One night I remember I went to a house where the best bed broke down under me. The family was poor, and the bed was a corded one with a rickety frame. I tried to turn over, and it began to rock and sway like a ship at sea. Then all at once down it went with a crash. But I clung to the wreck and slept amid the ruins until morning. The house people knew nothing of the disaster until I told them at the breakfast-table of what had happened. How mortified they were to think that their best bed had broken with the teacher in it!

"While the teacher boarded in a family, the housewife put company food on the table. We had a clean tablecloth and all the little extras — plenty of pie and cake and any other delicacies they might have or could scrape up. They would put my dinner in a basket for me to carry to the schoolhouse. In those days they never made sandwiches, but they sometimes gave us smoked beef that they had cured themselves. We did n't have any roast beef. Salt

pork was the standard meat. Yet, whatever else was lacking, if there was plenty of pie and cake, they thought you were fixed.

“A number of big girls came to my school. I suppose they were drawn by some personal attraction in the teacher. They behaved well, and I never kept any of them after school, though they often used to linger in the doorway as if they wanted to stay. Yes, I noticed some rivalry among them as to which should stand highest in my consideration. One of them was older than I was and had been a teacher herself. Another of them later drew a five-thousand-dollar prize in a lottery. Then she married. Of course the sudden wealth was too much for her. The farm was n’t good enough any longer, and she shifted her home to New York, got into fast life, and went to the dogs. That money undid her.

“At one of my boarding-places the woman was a great talker. I did n’t have to say anything. Her tongue would run on in a continuous stream of gossip as long as I was around. She was a good motherly woman, but she used to tire me dreadfully.

“Then there was a house where the man used to try to make a Methodist of me. We would sit up discussing religion until after ten o’clock at night, which was very late in the country. He would pump me full of his views, with copious quotations of Bible texts. I was n’t as familiar with the Bible or theology as he was, and I could n’t do much but



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listen to his dissertations. He was n't a deep or particularly attractive man. His appeal was on the score of a good bargain. If I wanted to save my bacon I must come into his fold.

"Those were barren times, and rustic dwellers did n't see much of literature except what they got out of their weekly paper. One man believed in witches, and he would tell me in a solemn strain of the wonderful things he'd seen and heard.

"The most interesting character in the town was a blind miller. He owned a gristmill that his sons ran by day and he ran by night. He was quite a marvel. It was astonishing, the way his remaining senses were developed to take the place of sight. He could walk anywhere, even go to New York alone. He was able to select a man's bags of grist just by feeling and never make a mistake. People said he could tell the color of a cow or horse simply by putting his hands on the animal. One night an old darky came to the mill and was stealing meal, when the blind man said, 'There, Sam, you've got enough.' It scared the darky most out of his skin.

"I was often homesick, and I was glad when the term ended in October and I could go back to the old farm in Roxbury. I studied at an 'Institute' in Ashland the next winter. Three boys from my home neighborhood were teaching school near Plainfield, New Jersey, and when spring came I decided to try to get a position as teacher in the same

vicinity. I went by steamboat from Catskill to New York, and the rest of the way by railroad. I had never ridden on the cars before, and as I sat in my seat waiting for the train to start, I expected the cars would get into motion with a terrific jerk. So I held my hat on to prevent it from falling off.

"I failed to get the job I sought and returned home. For several months I farmed it, and meanwhile studied, when I had a chance. Then I went down to Ulster County where I'd taught before, and was asked to take my old school again. They had n't had very good luck with their teachers since I left. The scholars had been very mutinous, and half a dozen schoolmasters had come and gone, all pitched out by the boys. I was offered just double my former salary, and I agreed to teach from September to April. I had no trouble. The big girls all came to school, and harmony prevailed generally.

"It was while teaching at Tongore then that I met Ursula North, who later became my wife. She lived five or six miles away in the next district, and I used to walk back and forth when I went to see her. One time I had to wallow home to my boarding-place through snow fully two feet deep.

"When school closed I was a student for three months at Cooperstown Seminary, and after that helped on the farm till fall. Then I went out again into the world. 'Go West, young man,' was the watchword in those times, and I borrowed fifty

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dollars from my brother Curtis and went to north-western Illinois, where some friends I had known at Ashland were located. I taught there in the village of Buffalo Grove, near Freeport, for six or seven months. I received big pay out there — forty dollars a month, which was much more than I could have earned in the East.

“All that part of Illinois was prairie country, and I got very fond of it. Much of the land had never been touched, but a great deal of this was ploughed while I was there. Acre after acre of black soil interwoven with grass roots was turned up to the air. It was unlike anything I had seen hitherto. The sods were soft to the foot, and I used to walk over the ploughed land a long way, when I was not tied by school duties, just for the pleasure of it.

“I liked to hear the booming of the prairie-hen. We had no such sound back home. It seemed to be floating in the air and to have no locality. There was something very charming and striking about it — this voice out of the horizon. I recall too how the migratory waterfowl flew over us that fall — immense flocks of them. Sometimes the geese would come down in the uncut cornfields — fields where the upper half of the stalks had been removed and the rest left with the ears on to stand perhaps all winter. You could hear for a long distance the wings of the wild geese rattling among the dry stalks as the birds alighted.

“Several times I borrowed a little fowling-piece and hid in the corn and waited for the geese. When they came near enough so I could see their feet and eyes, I’d blaze away, but I did n’t hurt them any. I could n’t with that fowling-piece. Nobody had a good gun out there then.

“If the geese stopped on the open prairie, acres of it would be brown with the feathered visitors. Once some of the young fellows of the village noticed a big flock accumulating so near that we thought we’d go out and get some. We waited till it was dark and started, armed with clubs, expecting that we could go right in among the birds and knock them down. But we walked and walked, and went far beyond where the flock had been and never saw a goose.

“We did n’t know that we could n’t approach a flock in the night. They keep sentinels out after the manner of a well-organized army, and at the least alarm they are off. They go like an express train when they once get started, and they travel at night just as well as they do by day. That’s the only wild-goose chase I ever was in.

The prairie was very fascinating, and I have a great hankering to live again for a time in the West and hear the old sounds and get the old feeling.

“I came back to my native region in the spring on account of ‘the girl I left behind me.’ It was pretty hard to stay even so long as I did in Illinois, though I got acquainted with girls there who consoled me somewhat.



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"I was still wearing my hair long, as did a good many young men of an independent turn of mind, but my betrothed objected to my untrimmed locks, and I had them shorn off.

"After spending a few months on the old farm, I got a school in Ulster County at High Falls, and in September I married. I was only twenty and with hardly more dollars than years. My wedding expenses were ten dollars. I had to keep right on teaching, and my wife continued to live with her folks.

..

"The school that I taught was sixteen miles from her home, and I would dismiss the pupils pretty early on Fridays and walk the long, lonely road, which was in the woods nearly all the way, to stay over Sunday with her. Monday I would start back at three o'clock in the morning through the night woods and get to my school in time to open it at nine. There was a certain wild, adventurous flavor about this tramping through the darkness that made it agreeable to me. But it was too arduous work for winter, and at the approach of snowtime my wife came and boarded with me.

"There was a vacation period in the spring and early summer which I spent helping on the Roxbury farm, and then I got a school at Rosendale, a parish adjoining the one where I had been teaching before. My wife went home and I resumed my weekly walks back and forth. I boarded at the village hotel, and

there I fell in with the local harness-maker. He showed me an invention of his — a buckle with a sliding tongue. I got interested and gradually was induced to believe there was a fortune in it. I made a drawing of the buckle to send on to Washington for a patent. The harness-maker was very poor, and, in consideration of his agreeing to give me half the profits, I let him have the money to pay for patenting. The village doctor was interested too, and finally he and I bought out the man for a couple of hundred dollars.

“Then I gave up my school and went to Newark, to interest some manufacturers in my buckle. But men who knew the business were shy of the buckle, and at length I made up my mind there was nothing in it. All this cost me a good deal of pain and anxious thought at the time. Now my money was gone, and I went to teaching again. The school was in East Orange, and I walked daily the few miles between it and the suburbs of Newark, where my wife and I began housekeeping in a three-room apartment.

“She had long viewed with apprehension an aspiration I had developed to become a writer, and she persisted in urging me to go into business, in spite of the failure I had made with the buckle. So at the end of the spring term, I looked for a business opening in New York. But my quest was not a success, and I soon retreated to my native mountains.

“From the fall of 1860 until the spring of 1862

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I taught at Marlborough, ten miles up the Hudson from Newburgh, and the next fall I got a school at Olive in Ulster County. I was n't prospering, and presently, as a solution of life's difficulties, I concluded to become a physician and began to read medicine in the office of the local doctor.

"In December I had a chance to get better pay teaching at what is now Highland Falls, just south of West Point, and I took along my medical books and went there. But those books could n't hold my attention after I began making use of the fine West Point Academy library, and I gave up the idea of being a doctor. My wife, who for some time had been staying at the Roxbury farm, joined me, and we resumed housekeeping. She was quite unwell during the early months of the new year, and, besides teaching, I was burdened with household duties and nursing.

"My school was the hardest one I had ever attempted to manage, and I took the most interest in it. There were a good many unruly boys, and I had a little scrimmage with one of the oldest of them — that is, I jerked him around pretty lively. I did n't whip him, though a bundle of twigs was always kept handy in the room. But I was heartily ashamed of the impulsive anger I had shown, and I stood up before the pupils and said: 'If I can't keep school without such scenes. I will quit. I'm not here to thrash you, but to help you.'

"I went on in that vein for some minutes, and before I finished I was weeping and they were weeping with me. They seemed to respect my motives, and we had lovely times after that.

"Every Friday afternoon we had a little talk, entirely outside of the school routine. An old pupil who sometimes visits me says I once talked on architecture, and he's always remembered it. I used to question the pupils and have them question me. In all the school work, my great aim was to make the child think and see why a thing was so. They were very apt to repeat by rote what they learned in geometry, for instance. But I'd change the problems so they'd have to puzzle a way out on their own account. I wanted to cultivate the habit of original thinking, and every once in a while a boy would say: 'Oh, I see! I see it now — never thought about it before.'

"I had a scheme of my own for teaching grammar. I wish I'd written it out. It was a more vital way of approaching the subject — something to show the application of grammar to speech more intimately. All those rules and parsing never in the world impressed the children as having any relation to daily life. They might know every rule in the grammar and yet sit down and write a letter full of errors.

"The Civil War was being fought, and the cost of living was rising. I asked the trustees to increase my pay, but they did n't do so, and I promptly quit teaching with the intention of becoming a volunteer



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soldier. I had never been content to look forward to making teaching my permanent and chief work in the world. I had grown tired of it. But now I was through."

## VI

*October, 1895*

### A TREASURY CLERK IN WASHINGTON

I LEFT the Hudson at Rondout and went by railroad far back into the Catskills to the little town of Roxbury. Then I toiled on foot up a steep mile-and-a-half hill to the plain low farmhouse which was Burroughs's early home.

The house is on a bank by the roadside, and the terrace on which it stands is buttressed by a stout wall of stone that has a flight of steps built into it. A row of maples grows at the foot of the wall and shades the narrow yard. Right across the road, down the hill, is the horse-barn, but this does not altogether hide the view beyond of great heaving hills and distant blue heights, and of the valley that opens away southerly with its mowing-fields and pastures and patches of woodland, and its criss-crossing of stone walls.

Behind the house is an old apple orchard, and up a steep hill in that direction is a sugar-bush of big gnarled trees. At the edge of the grove is a little gray shanty where the sap is boiled.

Burroughs himself was at the farm, and I spent two days with him rambling about his familiar haunts. We visited the sugar-bush, the scene of

## A Treasury Clerk in Washington 91

many of his youthful exploits with the family musket, we gathered nuts in a neighboring beech wood, and we explored the brook where once he swam and fished. Most interesting of all, we followed the winding road he had trodden so often on his way to and from the district school in the West Settlement. Nor did we stop till we came to the small rusty-red schoolhouse which he said looked just as it had forty-five years before. The children were having recess, and we went inside. The same old box desks were in use that had been there when he was a schoolboy. He found the very seat that long ago was his, and among the jackknife hewings on its pine boards discovered the initials he had cut — J. B.

We had an excellent chance to talk on our walks, and also in the old farmhouse. I remember with particular pleasure an evening in the kitchen, where the farm family had gathered after the day's work was done and the supper dishes had been cleared off the long table. Most of one morning Burroughs and I spent in the neat rag-carpeted sitting-room, beside a wood fire burning in the sheet-iron stove to temper the chill of the windy autumn day.

"I find it rather saddening to come back here to the old farm," he said. "It's like walking among graves — father gone, mother gone, everything so changed. Of course, it's pleasing to be here, but it's depressing too. When one reaches my age he sees the light of the afternoon sun over everything.

There's a pathos in visiting the old haunts, tinged with regret and remembrances. Yet, in spite of the changes, I still delight in coming back. I come three or four times every year. I feel I must — to sort of slake my thirst."

On another occasion, when he was talking about his youth, he remarked: "I liked to eat wild berries as well as pick them. But I found that huckleberries did n't agree with me. They made me feel as blue as the berries themselves and as if I had n't a friend in the world."

Is n't it possible that the source of the melancholy which often oppressed him in mature life was physical rather than mental, and that if his digestion had been better his brooding would have been less somber, if it did not vanish altogether? But whatever the shadows on his spirits, he could say on his eighty-third birthday that he had had a happy life, that his work had been play, and that he did not want a better world or better friends.

In my own acquaintance with him, the melancholy was never more than incidentally apparent. I should say that he radiated cheerfulness. But no doubt there was a difference when he was alone with his thoughts.

On my autumn visit in the Catskills I mentioned to Burroughs that he had told me how he had turned his back on pedagogy, and asked him, "What next?"

"While I was teaching in New Jersey," he said,



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"I met a young man named Allen. He had tastes similar to mine, and we became congenial friends. Presently he went to Washington, where he established himself in business as one of the proprietors of a rubber store, and from there he wrote frequent letters urging me to come and make Washington my home. One of his inducements, which particularly appealed to me, was that I would have a chance to meet Whitman, who was living there and whom he knew.

"So, late in October, 1863, after breaking away from school-teaching, I journeyed to Washington, ready for something to turn up. I went with a strong feeling that if I got close to the scene of the military operations, I would go into the army.

"Soldiering had a romantic as well as a patriotic appeal to me. However, when I learned that, even if I did enlist, I had small chance of getting to the field of action for months and might not get there at all, and when I saw how much the soldiers suffered, and how dirty they were, and how they were shipped on the trains herded like cattle, and when I observed the loads of wounded arriving from the battle-fields, the romance of war vanished and my militant enthusiasm wilted. I had n't considered the hardships, but thought soldiering would be like a big hunt — an adventure in the woods. So I looked around for a different sort of employment.

"The fellows in the Government departments

seemed to have a soft thing, and I set a little political machinery in motion to secure a department clerkship for myself. I got some letters of recommendation, and after considerable delay obtained a perfunctory endorsement of my application from the senators of my native State, and from the member of the House of Representatives my home district had elected.

“After all this did n’t help me much, but in the end I was successful, and on January 4, 1864, I went to work as a clerk in the newly established Bureau of National Banks, at an annual salary of twelve hundred dollars. For most of the ten years that I was in Washington I had charge of an iron vault in the Treasury Building, where the new unsigned bank-bills were stored, and I kept track of the money that was put in and taken out. I was pretty good at figures, but I never was a first-rate clerk. I was too careless, and I had n’t a smart, quick, clerical way. I would get to thinking of other things than the details of my work, and I’d make mistakes.

“After I secured this clerkship my wife joined me. We tried boarding, but that did n’t suit me. I am a born countryman who wants the green grass under his feet and I always had had a longing for ample grounds and the chance to have a home where I would be face to face with nature. So I began investigating to see what I could do. I remember walking seven miles out in Maryland to look at a place that

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I thought I might buy. My idea was to live there and grow stuff, and at the same time continue my work in Washington and go back and forth on the train. It seemed to me that the possession of a farm would be a good antidote to the Treasury Department, but the place was n't suitable.

"Washington itself was very rustic, and there were market gardens in all the suburbs and even on Capitol Hill. Eventually I rented a house. It was a quaint brick structure two stories high, and stood where the great marble Senate Office building now is. On the premises, in the rear, was a little tenant house where a darky lived. Besides, there was a barn, and, what delighted me most of all, an acre of land. So I was able to keep a cow and chickens, and to grow cabbages and turnips and other garden truck.

"I began to live a kind of rural life, and yet I could look up at the dome of the Capitol from behind the high board fence that shut in my domains. We sublet rooms enough to pay for the rent, and we had milk and eggs to sell, and people would come to the house to buy green stuff from the garden. Probably we realized a hundred dollars a year on our garden, besides supplying our own table; and I think we saved more than half my salary.

"I hired a man to plough, but did the hoeing and digging myself, and picked our pears and apricots and gathered in the pumpkins and squashes, potatoes, strawberries, peas, and beans as they ripened.

The Treasury was not much more than a mile away, and I did n't have to leave to walk down there until half-past eight. I worked in the garden before I started, and again when I returned, after being set free at four in the afternoon from my daily task of guarding the vault.

"But I did n't spend all my leisure in the garden. From the beginning of my Washington life I took every opportunity to get out in the woods and study the birds and be with nature. Every pleasant Sunday I went to church in the woods, and I was often among the trees during the week. I think I walked most in winter. The summers were too hot. I only had to go two miles to get to real pine woods.

"Usually I walked alone, but sometimes a congenial companion or two accompanied me. One Saturday afternoon in June a chum and I camped on High Island, and the next day we walked up along the shore of the Potomac to Dam One. The dam was low, with tranquil water above it and foaming rocky rapids below. On the upper side of the dam we went in swimming and started for the other shore, but we miscalculated. We had no idea of the pull of the water, and as soon as we were well out in the stream we were startled to see that we were being drawn toward the dam. We tried to swim up, but it was too late. The strength of the water was amazing. I felt as if ten thousand boa constrictors had got hold of me and were pulling.



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“Over the dam we went, and I found myself struggling in an eddy just below. It’s astonishing how such a fluid substance as water can drag and twist you, and how utterly powerless you are in its grip. I seemed to be no more than a straw. As I whirled in the eddy I came in contact with a rock that jutted above the surface of the stream. I clasped it and clung there desperately till I got my breath. The water had taken the tuck all out of me. I had no more strength than a baby. It was distressing to feel so weak and limp. At last I dragged myself up on the rock.

“My chum had been carried down the rapids to a pool, where he contrived to get ashore a good deal bruised and exhausted. When he had somewhat recovered, he came up opposite me on the bank. The roar of the waters was too loud for us to speak to each other, but I motioned to him that I would swim down the rapids; and by his motions he made me understand he thought that was too perilous. Then he hustled into his clothes and ran off to secure means for rescuing me.

“There I sat perched like a gull on top of the rock with the sun burning my back; and a whole blessed hour passed before a boat was procured. This was anchored immediately above the dam, the end of a rope was thrown down to me, and I was pulled up over the dam to safety.

“I mentioned having a cow. We had three, one

after another. Chloe was the first. Her keep did n't cost much because I turned her out each day to range free on the commons. Cows had the freedom of the city then, and you would see dozens of them grazing where now are solid blocks of buildings.

"Sometimes a neighbor's cow would get into my garden and eat the corn and cabbages. There was one particularly troublesome cow that belonged to an old Irishwoman who lived near by. She would come and butt and butt at my garden gate until the latch slid. Then the gate would swing wide open and in she'd walk. Naturally, when I caught her devouring my vegetables, that cow and I would have a scrimmage. The first time I found her trespassing, I hustled her out and sent a kick after her that failed to reach its mark and nearly unjointed my leg.

"But she kept coming. I remember one night well. I heard the cow munching in the garden, and out I went and cornered her and whaled her till she bawled. Yes, I thrashed the old cow pretty hard, and she bawled tremendously. It made the Irishwoman who owned her mad, and we had some words over the matter. Finally, I put a different fastening on the gate, and the next time the cow came she rubbed and butted in vain. She was much perplexed and wondered why the blamed old gate would n't open.

"The neighbors' pigs troubled me, too. They

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would root under the fence and eat my potatoes and pumpkins. They ran free, just as the cows and goats did, all over Capitol Hill and picked up a precarious existence. Those were the lax Southern days of Washington's development.

"One afternoon, when I came home from the office and went to my chicken-house, there lay a fox right on the floor eating a chicken. He leaped to his feet and dashed out of the door, and I saw him run up the square and into a house. He was a tame fox that belonged to a man who lived there.

"On a later occasion I had an experience with two-legged thieves. It was in the fall of the year, and I had about a dozen chickens and one turkey. I'd seen so much of them that I knew every individual in the flock. They'd follow me round as I hoed the ground, and were so tame they'd let me take them in my hands. I got up in the gray dawn one morning and looked into the chicken-house. It was perfectly silent, and I said to myself, 'Well, where are the chickens?'

"Then it flashed over me that they'd been stolen, and I was a good deal cut up, I can tell you. We had a colored girl working for us. She went home nights. When she came that morning and learned of our loss, she said: 'I heard chickens holler in the night. They were being brought into a house right next to where I live.'

"I went to investigate, and there, in the basement

of an oldish house on the edge of town, I found my chickens. The moment I opened the door I saw them lying on the floor before me. They'd been killed and dressed, but the thieves had left the heads on. If they'd cut off the heads, I would n't have had any clue. As it was, no one could fool me about those dead chickens. I knew the countenance of every one of them. Two colored men were in the room, but when I asked about the chickens, they told me I'd have to talk with the boss, and they hurried out to get him.

"They were gone so long that I got lonesome and went and brought a policeman. I convinced him that the chickens and the turkey were my property, and he let me take them home. There were some blankets, a buffalo robe, and other things in the basement. The policeman concluded they were stolen and he carried them off.

"We lived on chickens for a while after that; and what we could n't eat we sold, or gave away to friends. I did n't raise any more poultry as long as I was in Washington.

"The first summer of my stay there the Confederates made a raid that brought the fighting to within seven miles of the Capital. I volunteered to help in a hospital; but I could n't bear the sight of blood — I was always rather chicken-hearted that way — and after an hour or two with the surgeons I almost collapsed and had to rush out into the open air.



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"I saw Lincoln a number of times while I lived in Washington. I pressed his big hand at a reception one night in 1864. It was one of those rather frequent occasions when the public was allowed to file in at the White House and greet the President. He looked disheveled and careworn. I thought I must pause a little and pass some compliment, but I felt him pull me right along.

"Many years afterward I told Roosevelt of that, and he said: 'By Jove! I've had to do the same thing in order to keep the crowd moving and save time. I've done so much handshaking on some occasions that the next morning my hand would be all swelled up.'

"On the day of Lincoln's second inaugural I went off to ramble in the woods. I've often chided myself since for doing so. I found a wild dog with pups in a hollow tree, but missed the inaugural.

"Politically I was one of Lincoln's supporters, and in that respect was not in accord with my home people. I stood alone in a family of copperheads.

"Like many others I had gradually come to have implicit faith in Lincoln, though he was perhaps a little too meek and long-suffering and let the army generals and Government officials run over him.

"One morning just as my wife had finished getting breakfast that old Irishwoman who owned the trespassing cow came in and told us the President had been shot the evening before at a theater.

“‘Git out!’ I said. ‘What are you talking about? I don’t believe it.’

“But I saw she was in earnest and I ran out to buy a newspaper. We did n’t eat any breakfast that morning.

“Presently I went to the Treasury office, and found every one dumbfounded. Work was suspended. Lincoln was dead.

“I had a little horse and wagon, and in the afternoon I started to drive out three or four miles to get some strawberry plants. But I ran into a picket line and could n’t get through. The Government officials were taking precautions. They did n’t know what was up. There was great excitement.

“We’ve been having a good deal of discussion lately over Barnard’s statue of Lincoln. I used to see Lincoln, and he was no such grotesque country clodhopper as Barnard represents him. The statue is a caricature.

“In the autumn of 1867 my wife and I left our rented place and went to live in a ten-room brick house that had been built for us in the suburbs. There was an ample front yard, but only a little garden patch — probably fifty feet square — where I raised a few tomatoes and some corn. ’T was n’t very good land. There’d been an old Catholic cemetery on the spot, and what with the original digging of the graves and the more recent removing of the bodies, dirt had been thrown up on top that ought

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to have been below. The ground had been blessed, but its holiness was n't conducive to good vegetable crops. Nothing could overcome the natural sterility of that gravelly soil from the depths.

"The removal of the bodies hadn't been done very thoroughly, and when we were putting in a cistern we unearthed two coffins. They were decayed, but not broken, and we buried them alongside of the fence. While we were building the chimney and had completed it up to the second floor, it settled one night nearly two feet. Evidently, it was right over a grave and had gone down on the body. We kept on with the chimney. I thought it would tumble, at the resurrection, but I knew I would n't be in Washington then; so the man under the chimney could n't sue me. There he was held down by that great weight, and I expected to hear him groan, but I never did, and I never saw any spooks on the premises. We rented the upper part of the house, and the place was all paid for in less than two years.

"As time went on, my position in the Treasury Department became less and less to my liking, although my salary had gradually been advanced to twenty-one hundred dollars, and I had become chief of the Organization Division of National Banks. I must grant that Uncle Sam was a very easy master. He paid us well and did n't insist on our working very hard. I could even go out for a stroll at certain times in my short working day and be gone for a half-

hour or more. Besides, I had a month's vacation each summer that I spent in my old home region. But while my task was not especially irksome, I am not a man of methodical habits, and restraint of any kind is rather disagreeable to me. I'm sure I could n't stand it at all the way things are now in the Treasury. It's run about like a big factory. After ten years' service I quit and went back to York State."



## VII

*March, 1896*

### IDEALS IN EDUCATION

THE previous year Burroughs had built the woodland cabin which has become so well known under the name of Slabsides, and in January I received a letter from a Poughkeepsie woman with this preliminary legend at the top of the first page:

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

She went on to say that she had a “beautiful scheme” and “would it not be a charming idea for Mr. Burroughs’s friends to present him on his next birthday with such articles, useful or beautiful, as would make the little house a perpetual delight to him? It is well to build monuments to men, but I think it much better to put a little ante-mortem brightness into their lives. Yours with presumption.”

But I replied that it was quite clear to me that Burroughs would want to furnish his woodland home himself.

I wrote to him in March suggesting a visit, and his response was: “I may have to entertain you at Slabsides, as the girl has gone and Mrs. B. is ill and in bad humor. But I shall have things there for our comfort, and we will have a winter camp and much talk.”

That suited me perfectly. The weather was sharp

and the ground still snow-covered at the time of my visit. Burroughs walked with me from the railroad station up the western highway a short distance, and then along a rutted, irregular cart-path in the woods to his cabin on a shoulder of rock at the border of a swamp about a mile and a half from Riverby. The outer walls of the cabin were of bark-covered slabs nailed on horizontally. This gave the structure a little the look of a log house. The roof extended down on one side to shelter a broad piazza that had shaggy cedar posts.

As soon as I stepped inside the door I was greeted by the pleasant woodsy odor of the birch which had been used freely in the cabin architecture, and by the faint smoky odor of the fire blazing and crackling in the fireplace.

It was a house of three rooms, two upstairs and one downstairs, but a partition of yellow birch saplings ran half across this lower apartment, making virtually one room more. The inner walls were of planed boards, and the cracks between these boards were covered by split birch saplings. Beams, rafters, studding, and the rest of the framework timbers were mostly exposed to view; and all these were made of logs with the bark on. In the birch alcove was a sort of rustic bed of state made of small tree-trunks and slabs. The effect was original, though rude and raw rather than charming. Brushy woodland and steep cliffs were round about, except where the cultivated



*A Flowering Bush at the Margin of the Swamp*



*April at Slabsides*



*The Interior of the Cabin*



swamp made a break. The outlook from the cabin was hardly beautiful, but you did get a sense of picturesque seclusion.

The day was waning, and Burroughs at once began to get supper by setting certain things to warm on the hearth and conveying certain other things from a cupboard to the table.

After supper we washed and wiped the dishes, brushed off the table with the broom, and did such other tidying up as seemed essential. Then we sat down before the fire with a consciousness of duty well performed, and gave ourselves up to talk. The oil in the lamp ran low after a while, but that did not matter. We put out the light, and, in the gloom, the flames in the fireplace seemed cheerier than ever. A wind was blowing in variable gusts, making music among the bare tree-twigs and about the chimney mouth; and when it was from just the right direction the low roar of a distant waterfall came pulsing through the air.

Presently we put all freezable things on the stone mantel over the fire and retired for the night to the rustic bed in the birch alcove.

The place was pretty frosty the next morning, and even after the fire was well started our backs were chilled through, though our faces were perhaps being baked at the same moment.

One of the things we talked of on this visit was education, and Mr. Burroughs said:

“The children of the country have come much more to the front of late years. They attract more attention and are a good deal more in evidence than they were in my boyhood. Way back in the past, in England, the children used to eat at a side table. They were kept subordinate and got their chops slapped if they interrupted their elders. That was carrying things to an extreme, but there was some sense in it, nevertheless.

“When I was a boy, if we children on the way to school met an older person we would form in line by the roadside, and the boys would take off their hats and bow, and the little girls would drop a curtsy. We enjoyed doing it. I remember, too, that as we went out of school we would turn toward the teacher and say, ‘Good afternoon, ma’am.’

“Nowadays, at the end of the session a wild huzza and howl issues on the still air, and the children rush forth for all the world as if the schoolhouse had taken a puke. You’d think a lot of yahoos were let loose. And when you meet a growing boy to-day, you don’t get a quiet, polite bow. No, he saunters past without noticing you, or perhaps calls out at you insolently and throws an apple or potato at you the moment your head is turned. I’m inclined to think the old way was better. A certain amount of control and show of respect for authority is good for the race, and I lament the decay of these things.

“It is a fault that all our boys have — this want

of humility, of modesty. They are not deferential enough. It's in the air. Whether something better will come out of it, I don't know.

"There's one little boy in my neighborhood who always doffs his hat when he meets me, and his face beams, and it tickles me to see him. His deference is the effect of foreign parentage. He's a little Swedish boy. He's polite because he does n't know any better. He has n't acquired our Yankee independence yet. Of course I would n't want that we should have the air of fawning — daren't say your soul's your own — that is characteristic of the lower classes in the presence of the higher in some foreign countries. But I do like to see a feeling of consideration, not simply toward fancied superiors, but a show of respect toward all.

"A good deal of our boyish rowdiness is due to the parents' neglect or partisanship. They neither control their children themselves nor allow others to do so. If one of the children gets into trouble anywhere, they take the child's part without any effort to get at the real facts and quite independent of reason. For example, if one of their boys has a row with the teacher, you find the mother or father at the schoolhouse next day boiling with rage and abusing the schoolma'am.

"One day, when my dog and I were going along the road, a neighbor's boy threw stones at the dog. I spoke sharply to him, and he replied with some

piece of sauciness. At that I caught the boy and I cuffed his ears well. The following morning his father came out to the road as I was passing and stopped me. He was as mad as he could stick and denounced me for laying hands on his boy. But I told him just how the case stood, and that if his boy did the same thing again, he would get cuffed again. That was when my own boy was small, and I said, 'If my boy is ever insolent to you, I want you to take your cane and thrash him on the spot.'

"There's a good deal of fancy and feigning and make-believe about children. They have the same strongly developed trait there was in the pre-Adamite man for endowing things with life. I have it myself. If my hat blows away, I feel like jumping on it and punishing it.

"I remember how an uncle of mine was taking the honey out of a hive once, when a bee stung him. He was so angry he did n't stop to think, and he kicked the hive clear across the yard. That was instinct. There was no sense in it.

"You might think the bees would attack him then, but they did n't. If you have to do with bees, you're safe as soon as you break the comb and set the honey running. That makes them lose their wits. They all gather on the wasting honey and load themselves with it. Their greed is like that of the miser whose house burns. 'Oh, I must save my gold!' he cries, and he grabs all he can carry of it.



"If I'm going to cut a bee-tree, I cut vigorously till I get a little of the honey flowing. Then the bees are demoralized. I've never been stung once, and I've cut down fully a dozen bee-trees. The man who stands around in the background is the one that is stung. A bee comes buzzing about him, and he dodges and hits at it, and the bee stings him as soon as it gets a fair crack at him.

"You know it's so with other things. If you find an ugly dog in your path, walk right up to him. Then the dog says, 'Well, this man must have business here.'

"The man who edges off and looks for the people of the house gets bit. I don't know that a bold front would be very effective with a mad bull, though.

"A boy is a savage in his love of noise. He likes to make discordant sounds. It does n't disturb his sense of harmony, no matter how harsh and violent the sounds are. There was one while when the boys in the vicinity where I lived would take oyster-cans or something of the sort and tie them with a string to a stick and whirl them around their heads and make the most horrible noise you can imagine. Finally the people complained to the police and had it suppressed. No one else could stand it, but the boys gloated over it. As the boy grows older, he gets humanized and educated, and his aboriginal savagery wears off. Still, I don't suppose we've always got to wait for it to wear off. A right feeling about things

can be awakened earlier, no doubt, if you are judicious.

“Children are often unthinkingly cruel. They need to have their sympathies aroused. When my boy was a little fellow, three or four years old, I used to go to a neighbor’s in the early morning every day for milk. On one occasion I brought the boy a handful of nuts and said I picked them up on the ground under a tree where a red squirrel sat on a limb and scolded me all the time. When I told how badly the squirrel felt over my carrying off the nuts, the boy was as much incensed as if I’d been stealing. He threw away all the nuts in his hand and exclaimed, ‘I won’t have one of them!’

“Every spring I go and pick some orchids in a certain secluded spot near my Riverby house, but I don’t let people know where they grow. If I did, they’d all be pulled up in a single season, and that would be the end of them. The variety is uncommonly rare and beautiful, and it’s a pleasure to see them blooming there in the dense growth of ferns, weeds, and poison sumac.

“I wish the children could be cured of the greediness that would exterminate all our wild flowers. If they could it would be a decidedly good thing. But when they come across flowers they fancy, their way is to grub them up — all there are in sight, or till their hands are full. They seem to like bright color, and they reach for the gay blossoms. They’ll pick

ten thousand blossoms and have not a green leaf among them. The habit of purposeless or careless destruction is a bad one. It is barbarism to deface a beautiful page of nature.

"I think the love of nature as it is found in a mature person has to be acquired. You can't expect a boy to have the same kind of feeling for it. He has n't much sentiment. He's full of sap and activity. There's no ruin there, no scars, no regrets. Children love nature just as they do apples and cherries and sweets. They like to be under the trees and to follow along the brooks. Their enjoyment is not æsthetic nor artistic, and it would be a mistake to try to develop such enjoyment in any set or mechanical way. There's a difference in children. Many of them never will have any marked feeling for nature, however long they live. It's like the religious instinct, which some have and some don't. It has to be inborn.

"Children get too much coddling nowadays, especially in families that have money. Their parents make the mistake of over-doing, and lose sight of the virtue of simplicity. The youngsters have such a multiplicity of things bought for their amusement that they are surfeited by them. I know boys who, it seems to me, are being altogether spoiled by their parents' mistaken care and kindness. If they were in my charge, I'd bring 'em right down to first principles. They should have no guns, no bicycles.

They should eat plain food and sleep on a hard bed at night and be given plenty of farmwork.

"Yes, work is a mighty good thing for a boy. If leisure and play fill his time, his pleasure, after all, is pale. It's like living on pie. The boy who does that does n't relish his bread and meat; nor the pie either in a little while. Work makes everything about him sweet — the water, air, elements. Mental work alone is n't enough. He must be taught to do things with his hands. When my boy was n't over fifteen years old, he could knit a shad-net, go out in his boat and cast the net, pick it up, take out the shad — everything; eat the shad, too! He could row a boat with a great deal more skill than I could.

"We all ought to be able to work effectively with our hands, and I believe in having manual training in the schools. One day I had an expert chopper come to cut down some trees that were too close to my study. I took an axe and helped, and the way I swung it fairly surprised the man. But I could chop well because I had learned how when I was a boy.

"I'm dreadfully afraid that all this catering to children in literature is unhealthy. There are books by the hundred written for them every year. It's better to have few books than many. I would try to avoid exciting, stimulating, and unnatural stories. Dana's 'Two Years Before the Mast' is a book of



the right sort. It's good for any boy who's not spoilt. It's written by an author who's not thinking about style. You feel the faithfulness of the man. He wants to tell you just what his experiences on the sea had been.

"I have been asked to write schoolbooks to help children to love nature, but I don't see my way to it. To stimulate a love of nature as a feeling and a sentiment is all right, but to make it a task — there's no good in that. I would n't even teach botany to children till they had an interest in the plants.

"I did n't attempt to teach my boy flowers, birds, or anything else — as a task. If he asked for information, or in some way had his interest aroused, I was glad to help. I fished with him, I worked with him, I walked with him. In an indirect way he picked up a great deal of knowledge and he found out things I did n't know myself.

"One of the most charming sights I see in the spring is the child going to school with its hands full of flowers. I always respond to that. Yet it is n't a clearly defined love for the beautiful that prompts the flower-gathering. There is only a vague feeling behind. When the child brings in the flowers, if the teacher talks about them and tells her pupils something about them, that is a very good way of imparting knowledge.

"Let children soak themselves in the atmosphere of nature. Don't stick the knowledge on the outside.

Let them absorb it. What we want is the love of nature. If we have that it deepens our enjoyment of life.

"I believe in going to nature at any time rather than to books. A while ago I visited a select boys' school in New York City. One of the teachers and I walked in Central Park with the pupils and I helped them to identify the live birds we saw. That method is always in order. That's the way the Greeks taught. They walked and talked. After our walk we visited the Natural History Museum. You know that a great many different kinds of woods are shown there. We talked about those, and the boys asked me questions. One boy pointed out the fact that while some of the tree-sections had the old knots in evidence clear to the heart, others were free from them. He knew that every tree must have had knots at some time all the way up the trunk. He had asked a fair question, and I explained that certain trees had the power of absorbing the knots. There are the pine and the hemlock, for instance—they sponge out their record. They climb, and pull up the ladder after them.

"The child who's only taught a lot of bare facts comes away from school without any love of books or of knowledge. Really, the things the children *learn* at school don't amount to much. Heavens! it's the teaching how to think and the imparting of love of knowledge that are important. The rest is

only incidental. It's always been a crying want — teachers who will inspire. It always will be, I suppose. Children are taught in a mechanical way instead of a vital way. There are n't enough teachers who have enthusiasm.

"A woman in the West once sent me some manuscript about birds and outdoor subjects. I gave it to my boy and asked him to read it. When he finished I said, 'Well, what do you think of it?'

"'I think she makes too much fuss,' he replied. 'I like the real thing.'

"You see, unless we are quiet and simple, whether we teach or write, ideas are lost sight of, and you have only the rattle of the words.

"The way they teach literature in the colleges is calculated to kill any liking for it that one may happen to have before he goes to them. It seems to me I would lose my affection for Shakespeare if I had to dissect him and find out the meaning of every word and expression. I want to ride buoyantly over the waves. I want to feel the wind and the motion — not talk about them. You can't teach literature by bearing on. You can't show the charm of a book by the pressure of mere intellectual force on it. You've got to approach it in a different way. You must be fluid.

"All I should hope to do, if I were a teacher, would be to give the student the key to the best literature. We would read books together. We

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would read good books and we would read poor books. I would say: 'Well, we won't talk. We'll read and discover the quality. Here's a poor book. Don't you see that it is, as you read? It's over-drawn. 'T is n't delicate.'

"I would get at books in their sentiment and general character, not in their details. If you tear a piece of literature all to bits, you have n't the thing itself any more.

"Really, the nature teaching in the schools is only another form of cram. What the students get from their books is likely to be no good at all. I would teach nature to them out of doors, and show them how to use their eyes, how to discriminate, how to see straight. I would have them listen to the birds and pick out their individual voices; and I'd have them observe the plants, know how they look, and where they grow. It is a liking for the open air and for the wild creatures and the green things growing, that we want to stimulate.

"There is a simplicity and calmness in nature that we ought to have more of in our homes. I think it is a great point to be quiet in color and decoration. You don't want the stove in your kitchen to be all decked out in nickel like a barbarian chief. It would fatigue you to look at it. If you go into a stove store and see all these modern stoves, it has the same effect on the eye as harsh sounds on the ear. I want a stove to hold its tongue — to be inconspicuous and not intrude.



"It's the same way with wall-paper. If you see a sample that makes you exclaim, 'Oh, ain't that pretty!' that's just what you don't want. The right thing is something that will simply give your walls tone and atmosphere. Too much definition in decoration is disturbing. After a while it wearies you. But the country people and the masses, whose sensibilities are blunt, want something striking.

"There was a man who lived a short distance back from Riverby in a beautiful little house with a small wood-colored barn adjoining it and pine trees behind it. I used to enjoy looking at the place when I passed. But by and by he painted the house yellow — a raw, garish yellow — and spoilt it all. It was ugly. It was a blotch on the landscape. Yet he thought it was pretty — thought it was nice!

"It seems as if we never would be educated up to the point where we would see that the homely things are best. Still, if the beauty of simplicity was vigorously preached, and was taught in the schools, and if the local papers would take the matter up when a man paints his house offensively and show where the fault lay, the public might after a while get the idea through their heads. I'm not sure, though, that the local papers have much better feeling for harmonies than the populace.

"In fact, the newspapers in general don't measure up to their opportunities. They have been losing influence for years back — particularly the papers

published in the big cities. Some of them sold themselves to the devil long ago. There are certain ones so bad I would n't have them in my house.

"The Sunday editions of the city papers are a great nuisance. You get paper enough to make a bedquilt, and the reading is mostly trash. The columns are just filled with insignificant happenings all over the country.

"Yes, the majority of the newspapers, in what they print and in typography, fall far short of good taste. There are the 'funny' pictures they print — in the average paper those pictures are an abomination. The only thing that redeems a caricature is wit. Of course some of the pictures have wit, but most of the rude exaggerations are no better than what a boy does on his slate with his pencil — not so good, for they are more artificial than the boy's work. There's no wit in simply distorting the human form and making ears as big as barn doors and a nose as long as your arm. Yet I suppose people grin over them and think they are funny.

"There will have to come a great reform in our newspapers. They will be much more compact, and will publish news and nothing else. We shall be given less gossip and be spared that same old story with details day after day of how John Smith eloped with Mary Ann.

"The editorials won't be so long-winded, nor have such an air of infallibility. What do editorials

amount to, anyway? Oftener than not an editorial is written by a man of no real convictions, but who's paid for expressing the opinions that appear in print. We've gone through the juvenile stage of flatulency and gas. But present-day editorial writing is as if a man's tongue had grown till it hung to the ground and wagged all the time. He'd better get it back in his mouth. He should learn to see facts as they are and state them as they are.

"Once in a while I've had to talk to the young women at their colleges, and I try to stimulate their interest in things as much as I can. I don't dump a lot of technicalities on them. I try to find out how closely they observe. For instance, I tell them about the dogtooth violet. It's a kind of lily, and grows from a bulb six or eight inches down in the ground. 'This bulb,' I say, 'starts on the ground's surface. How does it get down there where we find it? I think I know, but do you?'

"I give them a hint and let them follow it up if they will. I let them teach themselves, and I let the work be done with love, not as a duty.

"After the indoor talk we go out for a walk. At one college we were to make an early start, and by five o'clock in the morning forty or fifty girls were on my doorstep — a great pool of girls bound not to miss their walk. When I heard them whispering and moving around, out I came, and we began our ramble. They were so anxious to hear everything

I said, that they crowded close after me. In fact, they were stepping on my heels all along the way. But that did n't matter. I had stout shoes on.

"The ear can be taught to discriminate among sounds just as the sense of touch gives us varied impressions through our finger-tips. I think I do this discriminating unconsciously. If I hear a sound, it requires no effort to decide what it is — whether the cry, song, or call of a bird or the drone of some insect. Every sound has a meaning. You must be able to take a hint. That is the great secret of observing nature. You must see what is going on, and draw conclusions.

"Some months ago I visited the grave of Phillips Brooks at Mount Auburn Cemetery, and while I was there I found a bird's nest right at the foot of his grave. What led to my finding the nest was the cry of a bird in distress, and when I looked about I saw a little chickadee with food in its beak. That was hint enough. Then I looked again, and I saw an iron gate-post with a hole rusted just above a hinge, and inside was the nest.

"One day I went for a walk with the girls of Wheaton Seminary. I would call their attention to the birds, their flight, habits, nests. We would analyze the notes we heard, and from the medley of sounds that nature is full of pick out such bird voices as we could recognize. In one wood we heard a rare bird, the solitary vireo, singing. He was up



among the tree-tops, and there was a touch of anxiety in his song. I knew he must have a nest somewhere near, and I said, 'Now we'll explore and see if we can find that nest.'

"We were among the pines, and the spot was like a cathedral, cool and deep-shadowed. One of the girls discovered the nest. She was a country girl, and she had sharp eyes. The nest was on a drooping limb there in the dim aisles of the forest, and I reached up with a stick and pulled the limb down. The female was on the nest, and she flew out only at the last moment. The nest was exquisitely beautiful, and after the girls had admired it, I let the branch gently resume its old position. The girls were full of enthusiasm over this exploit, and the more so because they had found a nest that I had not found before myself.

"Girls are always more responsive than boys in such ways. Boys think it more manly to show an interest in boats, gunning, and baseball. Girls are keen-eyed, and they have a certain delicacy that boys lack.

"I think our American women tend more to simplicity than they once did. Yet it's remarkable how they run after fashion, and befrizzle and bedeck themselves. There's a lack of seriousness as compared with the men. I went to a boys' school commencement the other day where there was a military parade. The parade was a beautiful sight. I was

charmed with it. But when I glanced around to see what the rest of the people were doing, I found that the women were mostly looking at each other's rigs. That's a little thing, perhaps, but it only takes a straw to show which way the wind blows.

"Nevertheless, tight lacing and paint and powder apparently have had their day, and there's not the former fear of a tanned face and hands, and of being seen doing outdoor tasks. One year a Vassar girl came to a farm near Riverby and got a job helping gather the grapes. She was a real worker, and she became tanned and strong and secured an added store of health and vitality. She had been taught to run, and she could run like a deer, and gracefully too.

"In my school-teaching days I knew an artist's wife who was a very beautiful woman. She took especial pride in her fine complexion, and she would n't go outdoors between sun and sun for fear of blemishing it. Her husband spent much of his time in the open air painting the beauties of nature, and here was his wife hiding from the light all day. She would n't even come out on the porch to sit, until the sun had gone down. You could n't find such a woman now.

"Our old notions of propriety have greatly changed, and very much for the better. The painted, befeathered, and befrizzled female is no longer our ideal. She's been the doll and the plaything of man long enough, and now, I say, 'Let her vote.' Any-

thing that will give her a wider interest will be a benefit. Her curse in the past has been the narrowness of her sphere. She has had nothing but the kitchen and the house — no outdoor interest, no impersonal interest.

“The ‘new woman,’ as you find her among the college girls, is a great success. She is manly in the best sense of the word — not afraid of dust or sun — likes to walk and row and swim. The college girls who come to see me are very attractive in their unconventionality of manner, and their freedom from artificial restraints. I recall how one of them took a snooze on my piazza at Slabsides in a perfectly natural, childlike way. I don’t like mannishness, but I do like simplicity and naturalness. These girls no longer pinch their waists nor pride themselves on small feet, and I think their more robust physical life means a great deal for coming generations.”

## VIII

*May, 1897*

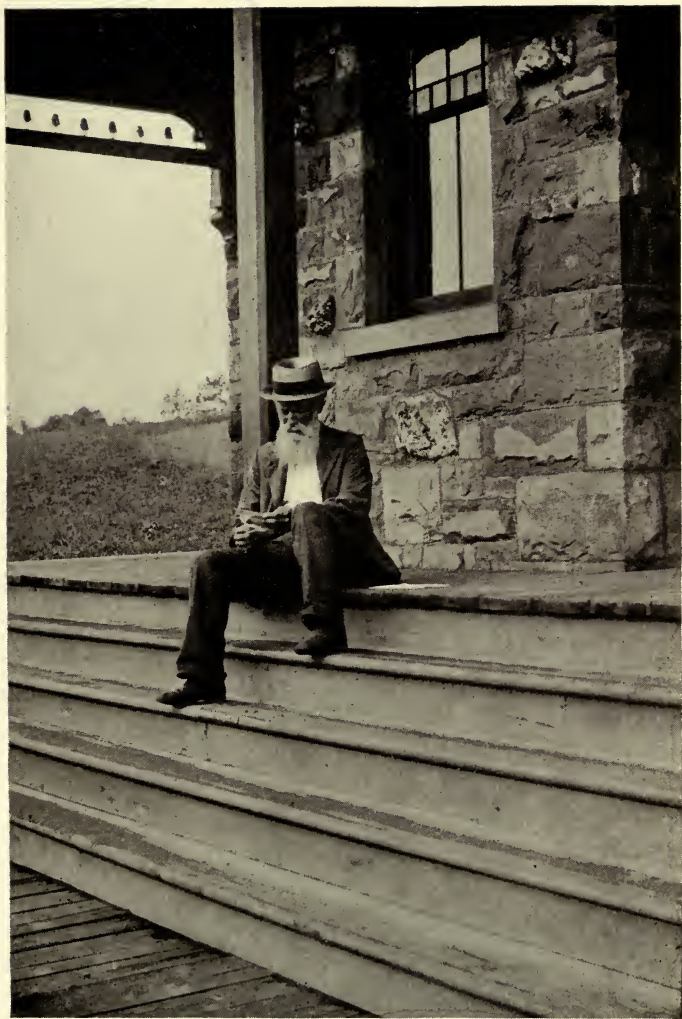
### FARMING BESIDE THE HUDSON

WHEN I reached West Park by train at seven in the evening, Burroughs was waiting for me seated comfortably on the station steps with his small black-and-white dog beside him. We went over the hill to Riverby and lingered in the little summer-house while the dusk deepened into night. Down below us on the Hudson some rowboats were moving about, and there were floating lights drifting with the tide at the ends of the shad-nets. Now and then a tug toiled past with a long line of canal-boats in tow. Across the river was a steam yacht that was turning its searchlight along the hillsides. Once the light blazed full on us.

I had expected to stay at Slabsides, for Burroughs had written me, "They are cleaning house at Riverby (they always are)." But Mrs. Burroughs chose to have us in the stone house, where she presided.

Rain was falling when the next day dawned, and Burroughs and I spent most of the time visiting on the upper piazza. In telling me what he had been doing since I had seen him last, he said : "The book that I've read with more interest than any other of late is Lloyd's 'Wealth against Commonwealth.'





*Reading his Mail at the West Park Station*



*“The Most Relaxing Position”*



*Afternoon in the Shadow of  
the Study*

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When I first heard its title I said to myself, 'I smell something in that book I want.'

"My boy read it, too, and wrote a long-winded blowout on it for his school paper. He writes with great ease — too great. The book has to do with the ways of the Standard Oil Company, a concern that robs the country of millions of dollars every year. It is perfectly conscienceless, yet the head of it is a famous endower of schools and colleges. The blood money he has given to educational and religious institutions would aggregate a vast fortune. But it won't blot out the record the recording angel must have against him if that angel has done his business at all.

"Any one who takes up the book can't lay it down. It is more fascinating than a novel, and it rouses your anger. If the book was written with the intention to make you mad, it is a success. I was so mad I wanted to go out and kick stumps. After all, anger is an interesting sensation. The author, if one can judge from his picture, is a gentle, poetic man, and the literary value of his book is very great. His sarcasm is as effective as anything I have ever read.

"I wrote to the 'Century' and told the editors that here was a man who ought to prepare a series of articles for them on our monopolies. They replied that his book was incendiary. Of course it is. Truth is always incendiary in a world of sham and

lies. Their answer stirred me up so that I wrote them a very hot letter. I did n't care what I said, and I thought the letter would break our friendship and that they never would take another article of mine. But it apparently has n't made any difference.

"I could n't help being irritated by their conservatism. I'm an independent in politics and would gladly smash the machine in both parties. I would vote to have the Government take control of the railroads and telegraphs and telephones to-morrow. I would vote to abolish private ownership in land. I would vote to have the Government take charge of the coal-fields, of petroleum, and all the great monopolies. I would vote to give women the ballot to-morrow."

Burroughs's comments on the Standard Oil Company were made at the time when "muckraking" in our books and magazines was creating considerable stir. It has been affirmed by persons who were in a position to know the facts that there was much of exaggeration and misstatement in what was printed about the Standard Oil Company, but, whether or not the observations Burroughs made about Lloyd's book throw any light on the subject, they are very typical of his reactions.

Milder topics engaged our attention afterward until, just as Burroughs was speaking with enthusiasm of the crops he hoped to raise on the Slabsides bog, Mrs. Burroughs joined us. "It's a valuable



property — that bog," she remarked sarcastically. "You can't raise white beans on it."

She had me go for a tour of the house with her, and called my attention to various improvements she had made and apologized for a grease-spot on the floor and for flyspecks on the window-panes.

By afternoon the rain had ceased falling, and Burroughs piloted me up to Slabsides through the wet woods. The place had been tamed somewhat since a year ago, and two new cottages built by friends of Burroughs for summer retreats were perched on the rocks. The bog was under better cultivation, and near his cabin was a little shanty occupied by a flock of hens. The hens were picking about the bog mould as if the surroundings were much to their liking.

Green vines had begun to climb the shaggy cedar posts of the cabin piazza. Indoors the living-room was taking on a more domestic air, though the dwelling was evidently a man's house, and there was the litter of a man's housekeeping quite apparent all through it. But the newness was getting worn off, and there were signs of use, and of adaptation to working convenience. Over the bed was suspended a wide framework with a fly-netting attached. Cords and wheels were so arranged that this contrivance could be let down at night and pulled up in the morning. "One mosquito will keep me awake all night," Burroughs said.

Before we started back, Burroughs hunted up the hens' nests among the bushes and rocks bordering the clearing and filled his pockets with eggs to take down to Riverby. One hen was sitting, and he remarked, "I'll have what eggs she has under her and give her a nestful to-morrow."

While we were rambling about or sitting together, Burroughs told me about the evolution of his Riverby home:

"The confining work in the Treasury at Washington did n't suit me," he declared. "I wanted to go to farming, but I hesitated to depend on farming for a living, and I accepted an appointment as receiver of a Middletown, New York, bank that was in financial difficulties. I went to Middletown with the idea that the work would occupy me only a few months, but I was there off and on for five years. The courts grind exceedingly slow and fine, and even so don't give the public much in results. In this case, however, the officers had stolen, and there was a bad snarl.

"For a year my wife and I boarded in Middletown, but I wanted a permanent home — some sort of a rural place with land enough to support me, and I looked around to see what I could find. My search took me out on Long Island once in response to an advertisement. But I did n't fancy so flat a country. I wished to be in a more rugged region that would be something like my native hills, and I

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wanted to be where both New York City and my old home in the Catskills would be reasonably accessible. I investigated several places along the Hudson that were for sale. Those I visited at first did n't have enough land, and I could n't have bought what land there was unless I covered it with dollars.

"After a while I heard that a man wanted to sell a ten-acre farm here at the hamlet which was later called West Park. The hamlet is one of four that form the town of Esopus. I came by boat, and I had a curious feeling, when I stepped on the dock, that the place was to be my home. It was a very distinct occult premonition.

"Doubtless many hidden influences have an important effect on our lives. There is a whole universe of things that sway us of which we are not cognizant. The stars may play a much greater part than we have any idea they do. We only observe the concrete things, but there is a vast world back of them, and occasionally a gleam of it comes through a crack of the mind some way or other. Yes, much is inexplicable from the viewpoint of our present knowledge. But a mental and spiritual evolution is going on, and depths beneath depths will open in the course of time, if we can judge by what has occurred in the past.

"As I said, I felt, when I arrived here, that I had reached the end of my quest. It was the only time in my life when future events cast their shadows before.

“The farm was in a very good state of cultivation. Grapes, pears, currants, strawberries, and raspberries were growing on it, and the owner shipped his fruit to New York. He kept a cow and raised hay enough to feed her. In the spring he fished for shad.

“There were apple trees, and the man had a cider-press and made champagne cider, which he bottled and sold. The cider was good — at least it tasted mighty nice — but I don’t think it was beneficial. He owned a receipt for making the cider, and he tried unsuccessfully to have me pay him two or three hundred dollars for it.

“The farmer had four or five children, and though he was pretty poor he managed to eke out a living. It was his scheme to sell his farm if he could get a price that would enable him to buy a good-sized one where land was cheaper. His dwelling was a low old farmhouse that had been built fully a hundred years and was of very little value, and the barn was so shabby it was almost worthless. Yet he asked seven thousand dollars for the place. Land was high then, but it did n’t warrant such a price. No other similar property along there had changed hands at so extravagant a figure. But I closed the bargain. I was reckless, and in my eagerness to get on the land could n’t wait. I said, ‘I must have it.’

“That was in 1873, and soon after I bought the place we had a great panic and things took a tumble. Anyhow, I had the satisfaction of owning a real fruit



farm. Near by were woods in which I could walk, and from some of the upland heights I could see my native Catskills. I was pleased, too, by the fact that not far from my acres was a big heap of squarish stones of all sizes wedged off the parent ridge of rock by the frost, and just the material I wanted to use in building me a house.

“My change of residence was a benefit to my health. I’d been having malaria down in Washington, and though I did n’t entirely escape it by shifting my dwelling-place, the malaria I had in the valley of the Hudson was less malignant and persistent.

“I began to build my stone house in August, the very month I bought the place, and by the end of the season the walls were done and the roof on. In the fall of the following year the house was finished and we moved in. It cost me six thousand dollars, in spite of the fact that I got the stone back in the woods without any expense except the hauling.

“I would n’t build the same kind of a house now. It was the expression of a rather green and uneducated taste in me. I had n’t any light on the subject and had n’t studied the problem. A low rambling house that would nestle down in the landscape would have been much better. Yes, if I was to build again I would put up a house that was much humbler and less expensive. Country houses as built now are apt to be finicky and elaborate. They have n’t the repose and dignity of the Colonial farmhouses.

“One of the curses of wealth is lack of taste and simplicity. Poor people, by necessity, have to be comparatively quiet and homely. But let them make money and they get gaudy at once. It’s astounding — the vulgarity of the rich. When a rich man chooses some country region for his home, I suppose the people there rejoice. But if he comes just to display his wealth, as rich men frequently do, he is a curse. It should be his effort to show people that a rich man can live a simple, contented life.

“The worst thing he can do is to build one of these million-dollar houses. If he’d repent, when he’d got it done and seen it there cumbering the earth, and would blow it up with dynamite, he’d show some sense. But he does n’t — and there it must stand for scores of years to corrupt the taste of everybody, and very likely be a burden to those who come after him. How any one can want to live in marble halls and be passing up and down marble stairways all his life is a mystery.

“The vulgarity of wealth should be sat down on in this country as often and as hard as possible. If you built a house that reached to the moon, you could only live in it, eat in it, sleep in it. All those who get sudden wealth seem to feel that building a house like a lord makes them lords. But the result is merely a monument to their lack of taste. Wealth should be used more for the common good — to make two blades of grass grow where only one grows now,

to bring to the masses increased comfort and refinement.

“If I was to build just to suit myself and in the place that would be most pleasant to me, I’d have a small house in a wood where I could step right out into nature. I’d build it without any reference whatever to outside people and passers-by. It should be made just to suit the comfort of the occupants, and the looks would be left to take care of themselves — and, after all, you’d be surprised to find what good architectural effects you’d get in that way. I would have broad roofs and plenty of windows and make the rooms cheerful with open fireplaces.

“But though my stone house has its shortcomings, it is well made, and I did n’t go astray when I used oiled native woods — oak, butternut, cherry, maple, and birch — for the interior. I hunted up many of the trees used for this purpose myself, and I helped get out the stones. All in all, the task of building the house was one of the happiest I ever engaged in.

“I took care that the library had a fireplace, but it’s too small, and it’s not a success from the house-keeper’s point of view. It makes a mess with its litter. There are ashes to carry out, and it causes dust and dirt, which a woman sees when a man does n’t. Just the same I would n’t do without a fireplace in my house and I would have it a big one. I like to look at the fire. The sight warms me — warms my spirit.

“Besides building the house, I laid out roads and walks, planted trees and hedges, and fixed up the old barn.

“I called my new home Riverby. I wanted a name suggestive of the situation, but which would not be so hackneyed as Riverside or Riverview.

“In the spring of '74 I took full possession of the place and hired a man to cultivate the land. My wife and I lived in the little old farmhouse until our new house was ready.

“Meanwhile, there was the Middletown bank that had to have my attention. But although my work as receiver was long-drawn-out, it was comparatively light after the first few months, and I had to be at Middletown only a short time about once in four or five weeks. As my work shrunk, my income from that source shrunk too. My writings were bringing in very little and my farm had n't begun to support me. I felt the need of some other source of income, and in 1876 I secured the position of examiner of banks for some of the Hudson River counties. Even then I could be at home two thirds of the time.

“I have had still one other Government position. When the West Shore Railroad was put through in 1884, we tried to get a post-office at West Park. I was the main mover in the matter, and after we succeeded, the people wanted me to be postmaster. I held the position ten years. The office was at the railroad station, and the station agent did most of



the work. I went in once or twice a day to help sort the heaviest mails.

"The Hudson was a great attraction to me when I was considering locating at West Park. I thought I could fish to my heart's content, and I could watch the passing steamers and sailing-vessels and the canal-boats with their villages of life, and I could have a rowboat, and I could swim in summer and skate in winter.

"But I failed to develop any very pronounced liking for the river. It gradually palled on me. If I went for a row the wind was likely to buffet me about, or, when I'd gone as far as I chose to go, I'd find the tide against me, and I'd have to labor to get back. Sometimes my boat would be stolen, and sometimes I'd draw it up on the shore and neglect it so long that it would all dry up and the cracks open.

"Fishing was another disappointment. I used to put out setlines for eels and catfish. The setlines were two or three hundred feet long, and at every three feet a short line with a hook was attached. But when it came to taking up the setlines, I'd perhaps find they'd got fast on rocks, snags, or something, and I'd quit in disgust trying to get them. A good many of my setlines are still out there in the river and have been for twenty years.

"Skating on the frozen waterway was one of my winter recreations, especially when my son was a boy and skated with me. I never had a pair of skates

in my own boyhood and did n't learn to skate until I was teaching near West Point.

"One breezy winter day when I was on the river, an ice yacht got loose from its moorings and came straight at me full tilt. It was a big one that weighed a ton. If I was hit by it, I would be mangled and perhaps killed. But just before it reached me, it made a tack and rushed away in another direction. A few moments later it crashed into the shore and the thousand-dollar craft was splintered into fragments. I've ridden on those ice yachts, but I don't like that kind of a ride. It's too cold.

"Sometimes in the spring I have a good time boiling down sap. There are a number of maple trees on the edge of one of the Riverby terraces, and I tap about a dozen of them, make an arch of stones, and set up a pan just as they did it at Roxbury. I boil the sap through the calm spring days and enjoy myself thoroughly. There have been years when I've made as much as fifty pounds of sugar. When friends come, we sugar off and make lock-jaw, a delicacy that you get by boiling the maple syrup till it's waxy, and then you spread it with a big spoon on a pan of snow. After it has cooked, you put a gob in your mouth and your jaws are pretty effectively locked till the gob dissolves.

"When I took charge at Riverby I knew very little of the science of farming. My present knowledge of the rotation of crops and their cultivation, and the

fertilizing and treatment of soils has been mostly acquired since. From the start I made the place pay. I farmed for the money there was in it, but I only cleared a few hundred dollars a year for a while, and that did n't take account of the interest on my investment.

"After two or three seasons I dug up the raspberries and strawberries on the place. Such crops were too hurrying for me. Berries are just like hot cakes — they need to be consumed at once. I had to get them off rain or shine, Sunday, Monday, and all the rest of the days. Sometimes the weather was so hot I'd want to go and sit in the shade. But that would n't do. There hung the berries with tears in their eyes — I've seen a little drop of juice in the cup of the raspberries many a time when they were over-ripe and the day was very warm. No matter if it was hot as the mischief, and no matter whether you could get pickers or not, the berries had to be picked that day. I pity the man who grows berries for the market. The first year we packed ours in the house dining-room, and afterward we did it in the wash-house. I got enough of handling berries, and I said, 'I won't be under the lash of these things.'

"The currants paid as well as anything. We got a crop every year for which we received from seven to ten cents a quart. At first we were able to get enough young women in the village to pick them, but later we could n't. Then we had a gang come

from Rondout. They were ragamuffins who raised Cain and were too disturbing. They'd drive you crazy. So we rooted out the currants.

"We've grown peaches profitably. I've sold some for as much as four dollars a basket, and a great many for two dollars and a half and three dollars. The largest crop was more than five hundred baskets. But the uncertainties were discouraging. You never could tell whether the trees would do well or not. They'd have thriven better if we'd had a northern hillslope for them so they'd keep steadily frozen all winter. On warm slopes the buds are apt to start in mild spells, and afterward they get nipped by cold, which kills the embryo blossoms.

"Some years we'd be left high and dry without a peach. Peach trees are unhealthy, anyway. When you've got one or two crops from them, they're about done for. We had four different orchards. One that was under the hill never bore a peach for six years. Then we harvested half a crop. By that time the trees were getting old and we cut 'em down and put in grapes.

"My house was never wholly satisfactory as a literary working-place. I wanted to get beyond the orbit of household matters, away from all the conventionalities, where I could be alone with my thoughts. So in 1881 I built the small study that stands a few rods east of the house. The outside of the walls is covered with chestnut bark, which I got



some choppers in the local woods to save for me. It has been a place of comfort and serenity, in which I could muse and write, and entertain at ease friends or strangers.

The little open summer-house near the study is another of my structures, and I like to sit in it on warm afternoons. Once a robin built a nest beneath its roof, and the bird took a dislike to me owing to a cat which was sometimes my companion. She would cry and flutter about in much perturbation. Well, I respected her prejudices, gave up the summer-house to her, and carried my chair to the shadow of the rustic study. That spot was my afternoon sitting-place until the robin had raised her family and flown away with the fledglings.

"I continued to attend to the duties of a bank-examiner for ten years, and I did the work conscientiously, but I grew tired of it. My mind does n't run in the clerical groove. No, it's of the free-and-easy sort with an inclination to roam abroad wool-gathering. I had to put the screws right on to properly do the tasks that fell to me. The responsibility worried me a good deal. Sometimes it troubled me nights. Once there was a defalcation in a bank that I periodically examined. I had noticed that the teller was uneasy when I was there, but he was very clever in his methods and for a good while eluded detection. If I'd been an old fellow, experienced in figures and brought up in the business,

— one who smells out things, — I'd have gotten a clue long before I did.

“I'd had a definite notion from the start of getting out of bank-examining as soon as my land would support me, and it was a great joy when at last I was free. At the time I bought Riverby I'd saved enough to pay for it, with the exception of a small mortgage which I cleared off in a few years. After I gave up my salaried position, my income from the land was a very satisfactory sum. I also realized four or five hundred dollars a year from book royalties and nearly as much more from my contributions to the magazines.

“In 1888 I bought an adjoining ten acres, and then I began raising grapes in earnest. The grapevines could be depended on to bear every year, if we did n't have bad luck, and I made grapes my principal crop.

“I went into grape-culture for my health. I was pretty well broken down — had insomnia and no appetite. What I wanted was something I could work at and feel an enthusiasm about. So I bought the additional land and fertilized it with the sweat of my brow, which is the best fertilizer in the world. Soon I could sleep again, and I ate my food with a new relish, and, besides, I made money.

“After I got going in good shape, there was one year I marketed fruit that brought me forty-five hundred dollars. My expenses were about fifteen

hundred. I kept a horse at a cost of a hundred dollars or more, and I put a similar sum into fertilizers. Crates took something like four hundred dollars, and hired help nearly a thousand.

“In spite of the fact that I depend on the land for a living, I don’t ordinarily work very hard. I walk among my vines and prune them and care for them. I don’t do everything myself, but I see it done. Yes, and I help to hoe, and to tie up the vines, and to pick the currants, and to pack the grapes in baskets and put them in crates. The time I pitch in most seriously is during the grape harvest. We have strenuous days then, and there is a lot of work I do personally, besides having five men and three women to look after. While the campaign lasts my hands get very callous, and I lose in weight about two pounds a week. I’m extremely tired when the season is over, but I think the work hardens me and does me good.

“My aim has been to grow very fine fruit and choice kinds, and to market the crop early. My grapes are all gone and sold about the time the other people in the vicinity begin to cut. The result is that I get much the best price. In most vineyards the grass is allowed to grow, and it is mowed just before the grapes are picked, but I keep the ground cultivated and stirred up all the time. I use Canada hardwood ashes for fertilizer a good deal. In them you find all the elements ready for absorption. Stable

manure is coarse. The ashes are vital and quick. They have more virtues than show up in any chemical analysis. Yet I've found I can't use them exclusively. They force a too rapid growth of the young canes, which in consequence get brittle and break off in the wind.

"Growing fine grapes depends on high culture and severe trimming. It's fruit we want — not foliage and wood. In winter we get rid of all the old wood possible and leave only a few young and vigorous shoots. These shoots send forth exuberant new branches that have to be curbed. We can't allow them to kick up their heels along the wires and indulge in riotous living. So we pull them free. When we do that, they droop down and seem to stop to think. It checks them at once, and in a day or two the clusters of grapes swell perceptibly. The vines always set more fruit than they ought to, and the superabundance has to be cut off. When we do this, the ground in places will be fairly covered with the green clusters. Visitors say, 'What a shame to cut off the fruit that way!' But pruning is the secret of success in grape-growing. So it is in literature. Prune, prune, prune! You've got to have the courage to cut out your pretty periods, or you're done for.

"One year I tried a vine to see what it would do without pruning. There were eighty clusters on it, and it was a question if it could ripen them all. Well, it did, but it was slow. It netted forty-five pounds



of grapes. Yet I made more money from the vines that ripened twenty-five pounds early.

“Yes, fruit-growing in recent years has been my chief source of income. I have several wealthy neighbors who grow fruit, and they say they don’t see how I make anything — they can’t. But they don’t have to. I tell them that if they had to make money on their fruit they’d make it, and there’d be an end of their complaining that everything costs them more to grow than it will market for. I’ve made fruit pay, and pay handsomely.

“I’ve had only two unsuccessful seasons. Once we were handicapped by a drouth. The other time everything was looking very promising in midsummer, and I went with my family to spend a few weeks in the Catskills. One day we had a severe storm, and we noticed it was much blacker in the Riverby direction than where we were. That morning we had received a letter from our man at the farm telling how finely things were coming on, but in the evening, just before supper, a telegram arrived which said: ‘Heavy hailstorm. Crop completely destroyed.’ My wife read it and kept it to herself till I had eaten supper. When I had that safe, she handed over the telegram. It agitated me so that I could n’t see to read it through a second time. If the crop was altogether destroyed, I knew the vines were so injured as to be worthless too. There was no sleep for me that night.

"Next day I went home. My spirits rose a peg when I got to the vineyards. A part of the crop could still be saved and the vines would survive. There had been a cloudburst, and it had rained 'whole water' with hail enough to whiten the ground. The hail had bruised every grape-cluster and injured many of the peaches. We had to trim out the hurt grapes when we harvested, and that increased costs. Besides, the crop was light and the vines had lost enough foliage to make the grapes smaller and later than usual. So the fruit didn't show up in good shape to get fancy prices.

"I know the reason why the hailstorm came. It struck only my vineyards and those of an adjoining neighbor. I told him the storm was the ghosts of orioles we had killed visiting retribution on us.

"The orioles do more harm in the vineyards than any other birds. They don't simply eat the grapes — they puncture them with their bills. They do that partly, at least, to get the juice, but they seem to continue the jabbing for mere pleasure — go on a drunk. We have to shoot them, and while we do so the old cat follows us around mewing hungrily. We feed him all the birds we shoot, and still he wants more.

"The market for what we grow in our vineyards did n't use to get glutted, and I've sold grapes for twenty cents a pound — lots of 'em. During the harvest we'd get telegrams every day from Boston

and New York: 'Price so and so. Demand good.' How those words, 'Demand good,' did tickle us!

"But, as the years have passed, the cost of raising grapes has remained about the same, while the price has gone down. To some extent the growers themselves are guilty of killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Large quantities of a grape called the Champion are shipped. It's a boarding-house grape. You can put it on the table and it looks well and smells good, but you can't eat it. Apparently it is salable until the boarding-houses are stocked up, and after that it is a drug on the market. It's an inferior kind, very hardy and prolific, but hogs can't eat it. In short, while it is attractive to the eye, it betrays the tongue. I would n't be seen growing those Champions any more than I'd be seen stealing. The public get disgusted with such fruit and they get disgusted with the unripe fruit that the growers send to market. I've been hoping the boards of health would take the matter up, and shut off the unripe and inferior fruits, but I'm afraid it's too late. I think the goose is nearly dead. Anyway, it's evident that people don't eat as many grapes.

"I chafe dreadfully under some of the methods of the vineyard-owners. What satisfaction is there in sending off fruit that you know is not what it should be and in trying in every way to raise good-looking fruit and early fruit, no matter whether it is eatable or not? The iron enters my soul deeper and deeper

every year. All up and down the river there is this mad rush to be first in the market and a fierce eagerness to get the tip-top price.

“One thing the growers do is to force the grapes by girdling them. If a ring of bark is cut off a branch of a vine it has the curious effect of making that branch grow more luxuriant, and the wood swell to twice the size of the other branches. I don’t know exactly why this is, for if you girdle a tree it dies. But in the tree the life blood flows through the bark, while in the grapevine it goes up the woody stem. The grapes on a girdled branch grow much larger and ripen earlier than on an ungirdled. It is an unnatural process, and the grapes, in spite of their fine looks, never have first-class quality. Yet they are passable if you let them ripen to perfection. But we don’t do that. The fruit goes to market just as soon as it looks well. That is the only necessity in early fruit — it must look well — and the man whose fruit reaches market first gets the top price. Lots of fruit goes that is n’t fit for the pigs. I can see the eaters’ mouths pucker in advance. I don’t like to girdle, but competition has compelled me to do as the rest did. I let my fruit hang long enough to be palatable, though. Why should n’t we sell a good article? To sell a poor article simply murders the market.

“In the earlier years I kept a horse, and I used to drive him on errands. Once I had an adventure with him that I shall never forget. The beast ran



away with me. I tore my clothes, and I tore my skin. My wife mended my clothes, but my skin had to get along the best way it could. I was going to Esopus, a village a few miles to the north, with a load of empty berry-crates. Presently I came to a pitch downhill, and I began to pull on the reins to make the horse go slower, and the crate I sat on began to give. The next thing I knew, down I came on the horse's back with the crate after me. It was enough to make a dead horse run. He started off lickety-brindle and left me in the road; and every few moments, as he galloped along, another crate jolted off and exploded. When the horse got to the village he turned a corner, and the wagon struck a telegraph pole and actually took it right off. But the shock slackened the horse's speed, and some one caught him. Taken all in all, I had a lively scrimmage.

"Yes, although things at Riverby were as a rule serene and even humdrum, a spice of excitement was not entirely lacking. I remember how I got mad once that summer I had the horse adventure. I'm always sorry in such cases afterward, for getting mad is undignified and does no good, but I think I had great provocation. I was passing the place of a cross-grained fellow who owned a cross-grained dog, when the dog rushed out at mine and began a fight. My dog is plucky and he fought back. He is n't afraid. You sick him on and he'll take hold of an elephant and clinch him. I had a friend along with

me, and we each took a dog by the tail and pulled them apart. I had the assaulting dog, and I threw him over the fence. But no sooner was my dog loosed than he was over the fence after the other dog to continue the fight. Then the dog's owner appeared on the scene with a pitchfork, crying out that he would run my dog through. The idea, when his dog began the row! I was mad, and I gave the man a piece of my mind. I speak pretty fluently when I'm mad, and loud too — holler just as my father did.

"I had to be a farmer. I never would have been content otherwise. I come of a family that has always lived on the soil. Muscular labor brings its recompense, for you relish your sleep and your victuals. I have as much comfort in being tired as in anything else. Sometimes I will take a long walk just for the pleasure it'll be, when I get back, to sit down — that's such a luxury!

"In the less busy portions of the year I work some every day — probably more than half the time; but that leaves me plenty of leisure to poke around the woods and sit under the trees. I do a good deal of 'loafing and inviting my soul,' as Whitman says. It is my way of getting mental and physical relaxation, and I find that such loafing is the proper thing for me. Where other people would rust, I thrive.

"As to the village in which I've made my home, it has had one serious lack — it is rather poor in the way of human companionship. There is almost no

middle class. What I miss is persons with tastes like my own, but the neighbors are either millionaires or poor working-people, and I don't sympathize with the interests of either. None of the dwellers in the region has become my intimate associate.

"The next place north of mine was acquired by a set of religious men, who established a monastery there. They are an Episcopal brotherhood known as the Holy Cross. What they are trying to do is to revive the monastic ideas of the Middle Ages. But I can't imagine their making a permanent success, for the scheme is out of joint with the present times.

"I am very well situated for going occasionally to my Catskill home and to New York; and Whitman and other friends have been here to see me. Besides, a constantly increasing number of visitors have come just out of curiosity.

"So far as nature is concerned, I've had all the elements at Riverby I could expect to find anywhere. I probably could n't have struck a better situation for getting into contact with wild life. The valley is a natural highway of birds in their migrations north and south, and this brings to my door the feathered folk of many latitudes. Also, the village is right on the threshold of a great tract of rugged, untamed country, studded and laced with secluded ponds and streams, that extends back for miles and miles. This wilderness has been cut into a good deal, and there are some streaks of land that are farmed,

but most of it is n't cultivatable. The combination of the fertile strip bordering the river and the nearby wild region appealed to me strongly when I first investigated the place. If all the region had been highly cultivated, I probably should have located elsewhere. There was mental stimulus in being close to the soil and delight in taking the birds and other wild creatures into my intimacy and affection. It was a great enjoyment and is yet.

"So I've been as happy at Riverby as most men are anywhere in this world of ours, I guess."



## IX

*September, 1897*

### RUSTIC HOUSEKEEPING

I ARRIVED at West Park about sundown and found Burroughs at the station amid a group of local men, women, and children who were sitting or standing about to see the train come in. He carried a market-basket on his arm, and we went to the near-by country store, where he bought and stowed into the basket some groceries. When we came away he said, "I've been a good customer there for canned goods and prepared foods since I took to living in the woods."

He was a vigorous walker, and as he led the way toward Slabsides it was as much as I wanted to do to keep up with him. We did not go by the road and the cart-path, but by a rocky, slippery short-cut through the full-foliaged woods up a steep hill. That saved half a mile, and it was Burroughs's customary route. The evening dusk was thickening into night, but we were assisted somewhat in avoiding stumbling by a three-quarters moon that let fall scattered shreds and patches of yellow light through the leafage. The weather was warm, and it was a sweaty climb.

Halfway up was a leaning dead tree. There Burroughs stopped, set down his basket, and rested his

back against the barkless tree-trunk for a few minutes. "It 's a habit I have when I'm going up this path," he informed me.

A good many tall hemlocks grew in that vicinity, and he said, "Along here in the damp mould of the evergreen shade one finds those ghostly growths — Indian pipe, beech drops, and coral moss."

We soon resumed our climbing, and at length the path came out in a grassy woodroad, and the hardest part of the journey was past. As we approached Slabsides, the pleasant odor of growing celery came to us, and then we emerged from the woods into the rock-bound clearing, and there was the cabin close at hand looming dull and dark against the sky.

Burroughs's brother Hiram was living with him at Slabsides, and he was sitting on the piazza. A nephew, "Ed," who helped with the work at Riverby, was also there, and we took off our coats and settled down with them to cool off. We were well above the swamp basin, and we could see faintly in the moonlight its plot of straight celery-rows, its patches of cabbages and potatoes and sweet corn.

Now and then a mosquito came around to investigate, and while we talked we slapped. The katydids were engaged in their harsh disputing in the trees, a whip-poor-will sang a few notes from the near rocks, and at intervals we heard a little screech owl quavering not far away.

By and by we saw lantern lights moving about

among the trees and we concluded that a coon hunt was in progress. Soon the lights came in our direction, and as they drew near, Burroughs's dog got excited and began to bark; nor would he stop when his master spoke to him. So Burroughs threw a stick at him and drove him under the piazza, where he growled from time to time until the huntsmen arrived. There were three of them and a dog, and they sat on the steps and talked coon for half an hour. Then they lounged off into the woods and continued their hunting.

Toward nine o'clock we went to bed, and Burroughs and I occupied the bed of state in the birch alcove.

One curious sound that never ceased, night or day, was a crackling noise made by the wood-borers which were working underneath the bark in the rustic house timbers. It was very mysterious — that continuous frying and sputtering coming out of the log framework.

When I awoke the next morning, a tree cricket was calling monotonously just outside the window, a hornet was buzzing about the room after flies, and from the mountain came cries of blue jays and crows. The dog padded in from his box on the piazza and put his paws on the bed and wagged his stubby tail, and we obeyed his summons and turned out. It was not yet six o'clock.

Burroughs took charge of the breakfast prepara-

tions. First he stepped out and got an armful of wood and started the fire. There was a chill in the morning air, and as the blaze began to lick up the kerosene-soaked splinters the dog settled down on the hearth with his head between the andirons to catch the warmth.

"Hi," a grizzled, slouchy man of threescore years and ten, went forth to feed the poultry, and returned with half a dozen eggs. Ed brought water from the spring. On the piazza was a crooked stick — "one that has turned a summersault in growing," Burroughs said as he examined it with interest. Somebody had left it expecting that he would work it into the architecture of his cabin or furniture.

While he was bending over the kettle of sweet corn that was boiling for breakfast, he suddenly exclaimed, "Thunder! I've got soot in there — of all the tribulations of a cook!"

Besides the corn, we had oatmeal, eggs, milk, tea, honey, bread, and fried bacon; and there were tomatoes, cucumbers, and peaches, which were handed around in their skins for each one to deal with as he chose. There was no ceremony about our eating. We sat at the table in our shirt-sleeves, helped ourselves to what was within reach, and each went to the fireplace to get an egg when he was ready for it. The butter was in a tin pail, whence we extracted it with our knives to suit our individual needs.

After breakfast Hi and Ed went off to work at



Riverby, and Burroughs washed the dishes, set part of the things away in the cupboard, and pushed the rest to one end of the table and covered them with fly-netting. The dishwater he threw out of a rear window. All the waste was disposed of in that way. When the morning housework was finished, he went out and sat on the rail of the piazza, where a blossoming vine, the mountain fringe, had festooned a post, and, with the aid of his field-glass, watched a little hawk on a bare tree of the mountain-top. Soon he came indoors and wrote some letters at a table in the literary corner of his cabin — a corner which he had equipped with bookshelves.

There were ducks as well as hens at Slabsides, and presently Burroughs went out and talked to them very companionably. He called them "Quackens." One of them was a wild duck. "Julian captured it after a shot from his gun had broken its wing," Burroughs explained. "It seems content with its tame companions now, though it always keeps a little apart."

He prepared to go down to Riverby for the day by putting up our dinner in a tin pail and filling a basket with potatoes that he turned out of the bog mould to carry to his wife. When we arrived at his house by the Hudson, he gave such orders as were needed to his workmen and went to a shed, where he nailed up crates of grapes and marked them with rubber stamps. Once we resorted to the summer-

house, and he made himself comfortable by lying on a long bench seat flat on his back for a while. "This is the most relaxing position there is," he said.

At noon we ate our tin-pail dinner, then did more grape-packing and picked peaches. The sky grew dull as the day advanced, and rain began to fall. We left for Slabsides at five, and Ed went with us. He and I had old rubber blankets wrapped around our shoulders. Burroughs carried an umbrella. Hiram had gone in time to escape the rain.

When we came into the swamp clearing, we saw three boys sneaking out of a corn-patch with their arms full of ears. Burroughs called out at them sharply, and the two smaller boys dropped their loads, and all hurried out of sight.

"Those are Amasy's children," he said to me. "You've seen Amasy — that rather shiftless farmer whom I often have working on the swamp here. He lives about a mile farther back in the woods. I gave him leave to pick what ears he wanted to use from a patch of sweet corn at the other side of the swamp, but his boys were in a patch near my cabin that I'd reserved for myself. Hiram planted this near piece, and the ears are so enormous that he has taken great pride in it and was saving the best of the ears for seed."

We went into the cabin, and the tale of the marauders made Hiram very angry. He wanted to wreak vengeance on them, and he called them all sorts of names mixed with profanity.

"They've taken your seed ears, Hi, I'll warrant ye," Ed said.

"Oh, yes! they've taken your seed ears, I'll warrant ye," Burroughs echoed.

"I'll warrant ye, they have," Hi assented dismally, and he used some more bad language and went out to look over his garden and see if the rascals had carried off anything else.

"Well," Burroughs said, "I must get supper for the boys" — that is for Hi and Ed.

He lit his student lamp and soon had the food on the table, and we all sat down and ate. Afterward, while he did the clearing up, Hi read from his bee magazine. When the dishwater had been thrown out of the window and the table wiped off, Burroughs brought out a ghastly portrait of himself that some amateur was painting and showed it to me.

The weather was brighter next day, and as soon as the housework was done, Burroughs and I walked over the western ridge and down into the valley of the Shattega, a favorite resort of his. The Shattega is a luscious, swampy little river that in one place breaks into a noisy waterfall. The dog ran out on the rocks there and attacked the white rush of water with great courage. Sometimes it would knock him off the slippery rocks into the pool below, and again it would fill his mouth and eyes and choke and blind him, but he would not acknowledge himself vanquished. He seemed to think the foam-

ing water was alive. Burroughs greatly enjoyed his dog's ardor.

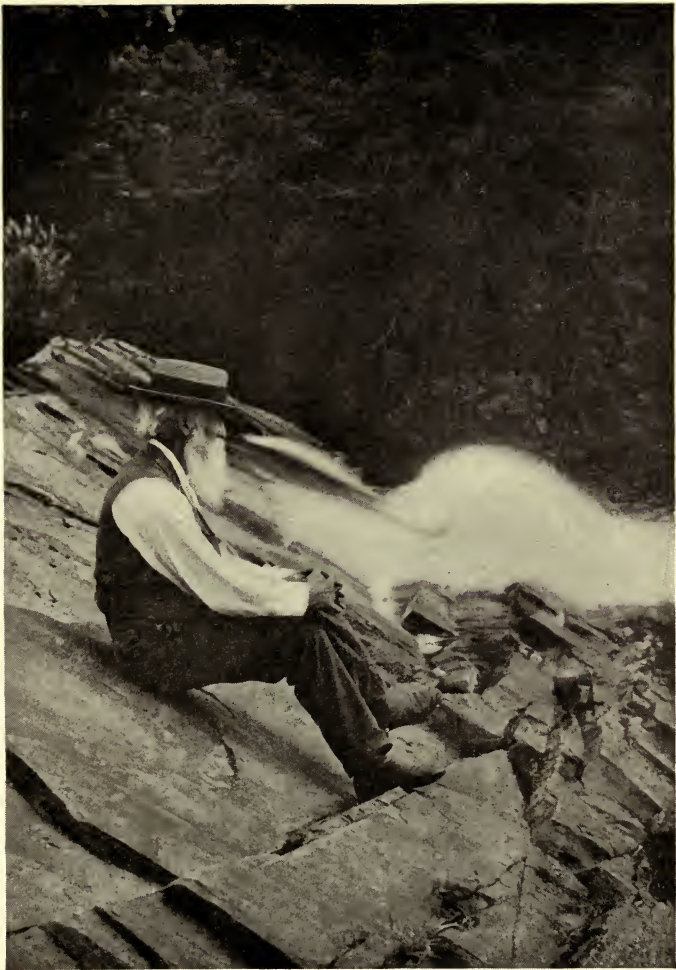
Presently we went to help with the vineyard work at Riverby, but returned to Slabsides in the middle of the day. There we found a man who was the proprietor of a hardware store in one of the towns of the Catskills, and, because he had some slight acquaintance with Burroughs, had come to call on him. He was a self-sufficient sort of fellow, very voluble, and given to peppering his most ordinary conversation with swear-words for the sake of emphasis and geniality.

When Burroughs set forth the dinner, he apologized for the chops, which he had unfortunately scorched. But the hardware man said: "You don't need to make no excuses. This dinner suits me. I'd rather be where I am than at any gol-darn hotel I ever was at."

Later, he took advantage of a chance to speak to me privately, and remarked: "I know the Burroughs family up in Roxbury, and John is the smartest of the lot. He's forgot more than all the rest ever knew. What puzzles me is who he took his smartness from. I never heard that either his father or his mother amounted to much."

By and by the hardware man leisurely departed by way of the wood-road, and as soon as he disappeared we went down the short-cut to Riverby and got to work in the vineyard. The village school-





*A Waterfall in Slabsides Woodland*



*Beside the Shattega*



*On the Road to Slabsides*

house was not far from Burroughs's premises, and as the time approached for the school to let out he said: "I wish you'd go up and watch those children pass my place. They've got a notion lately of climbing over the stone wall and stealing my grapes. If they'd come to me when they're grape-hungry, I'd give them grapes. I don't want them stealing. Besides, they don't eat half they pick, but strew the grapes along the road."

I went up within sight of the children as they came along and they did no raiding that time. On my way back Mrs. Burroughs spoke to me from the house, and I stopped to talk with her. She told me all the news, and she discussed Slabsides with an air of complaint because Burroughs lived off in the woods and left her at Riverby, and she repeated what the neighbors said about this arrangement. He had suggested that she should close up the house and go off for a vacation in the summer, but she knew the dampness would ruin everything in the rooms if she did, and so she preferred to stay and be a martyr.

Mr. Burroughs had already made his comment on the situation to me with a good deal of feeling. "In some ways," he said, "my wife is one of the best women in the world, but I can't help regretting that she has so devoted a regard for the trivialities of housekeeping. Housekeeping is all very well as a means to an end, but I don't think it ought to be made an end in itself. There's no changing her, how-

ever, and she's so constituted that she is n't content unless she has something to worry over. I wish she would make a home for me. It is n't right, with all my other work, that I should be forced to do such an amount of housework. I'd still be doing housework even if I were at Riverby, but I'm able to have my brother with me up at Slabsides, and I escape many things that are disturbing to my easily ruffled sensibilities."

The fame of John Burroughs and the general interest in him make his domestic affairs a subject that cannot be passed over lightly. To say nothing leaves rumor free to scatter broadcast a mixture of fact and fiction which leaves the truth hopelessly distorted. It has seemed to me that frankness is the best course to put matters to rights, and I have recorded such things as came within the range of my observation. Taken all together, I think they convey a fair idea of the situation. When Burroughs and Ursula North married at about the age of twenty, they were both rustic dwellers in the remote Catskill region. Her development did not keep pace with his. Her tastes continued rustic, and the friends she felt most comfortable with were plain everyday folk who did not interest him. He had just as decided likings as she did, and he was sensitive and temperamental. They grew apart, but not to any fatal degree, as I think my record proves. The two were not ideally mated, but things might have been worse. If Bur-



roughs had married a spendthrift, or a sloven, or a follower of fashion, or a society butterfly — that would have been a disaster.

Burroughs spoke of Julian's entering college that fall, and added: "The great boat-races between Harvard and Yale took place here on the river a few weeks ago, and for a month previous we saw the Harvard crew practicing up and down the stream in view of our house. Julian caught the infection and adopted their costume. He went about his work in the scantiest sort of apparel that could be anyways called civilized — bareheaded, barearmed, and barelegged. He has an itching to get on the Harvard crew, but I've put my foot on that. I believe their racing is killing work."

The day was very warm, and that night at Slab-sides we found the mosquitoes out in force. So, when bedtime came, Burroughs let down his fly-netting and we crawled under and slept in peace.

On the following morning, after the little jobs about the house were done, Burroughs locked the door and put the key under the doormat, and we went down to catch the train I was to take. But we miscalculated and did n't get to the station soon enough. The next best thing was to go to Poughkeepsie by a little river steamer, and we parted on the West Park wharf.

## X

*May, 1900*

WALT WHITMAN

WHEN I got off the train at West Park, Burroughs was just coming to the station for his morning mail. Men were at work trimming up around the station, replacing the somewhat uncertain grass with lawn, thinning out the trees and shaping those they left, and making symmetrical roadways surfaced with broken stone. This was done by wealthy local residents. Burroughs did n't approve of the supposed beautification. "I think it is artificial and offensive," he declared.

His brother had returned to the Catskills, and he lived at Slabsides only when he had company. "We'll go up there to spend the night," he said. "Meanwhile we'll try to enjoy ourselves here."

So we walked over to Riverby. Breakfast had been eaten, but he brought out a lunch for me and set it on the kitchen table. Later, we went down to the study.

"The brick fireplace and chimney here are too small," Burroughs said. "I'm going to tear them out and rebuild with cobblestones."

(He had this done the next summer, and it greatly

improved the appearance of the building both inside and out.)

A jew's-harp lay on the study-table. "That is my only musical instrument," he told me; "and when the cares and tribulations of the world get too much for me, I console myself by playing on it. My brother on the Catskills farm plays a jew's-harp too. He keeps his hanging on the window-casing, where he can reach it from the chair he usually sits in."

We went for a ramble later. As we were starting, Burroughs spoke to his two hired men, who were cultivating the vineyard and stripping the new sprouts off the wires. He told them that if it got too hot they could lay off in the middle of the day and make up the time afterward. We walked down through the vineyard toward the river till we came opposite a poor white's cottage on adjoining land. Burroughs's wrath was roused to find that the cottage chickens had been scratching around his young grapevines and damaging them.

The orchards were full of pink bloom, which he contemplated with delight. "I want to write a poem about orchards," he remarked.

He showed me a nest begun by an oriole on a pendant elm bough, and we sat down in a field to watch the nest-building of a chebec (the least fly-catcher).

When we returned we cut some asparagus for dinner and carried it to the house. Mrs. Burroughs

had me make a pilgrimage from room to room, under her guidance, to see what she had been doing in house-cleaning. Everything was spick and span, and all the furnishings were arranged in regular order as if they had never been used. The rooms that she was most choice of were dim, and the sunlight was shut out to keep things inside from fading and to discourage the flies from making themselves at home.

After the inspection was concluded, the housewife cut up the asparagus and set it cooking and put some potatoes in milk gravy on the stove, and told Burroughs to take care of them. He and I went into the dining-room, where he lay down on the sofa. We talked till the voice of Mrs. Burroughs sounded faint and far off from the pantry.

At once he jumped up as if panic-stricken and made a dive into the kitchen. "Yes, I'm stirring it," he called back to her. "It ain't done yet. I like potatoes brown."

She was in a hurry to go to Poughkeepsie, and we had an early dinner in the kitchen, where the food was put on a table that was pushed back against the wall.

"You can clear away the dishes," she said to Burroughs as she was leaving.

"What shall I do with them?" he asked.

"Wash them," she replied; "and you must put some coal on the fire." (She kept the fire going, no matter how hot the weather.)



He dutifully attended to this work and afterward went out and looked at a thermometer hung on a post of the piazza. The mercury was up in the nineties. We loitered about until the heat had moderated somewhat, late in the day, and then he put a few eggs, bread, and other supplies in a basket and we started for Slabsides. On the way he stopped at a house and bought a quart of milk.

Four other dwellings now kept Slabsides company on the adjacent cliffs. Burroughs pointed to one of them, and said: "That's the latest, and it cost four thousand dollars. It was built by a man named *Millard*. His name was *Millard* before he accumulated wealth."

We walked across the swamp, with its long rows of young celery, and got a drink at Burroughs's favorite spring, and he showed me an empty rabbit's nest, saying, "It had two young rabbits in it a few weeks ago, but they perished in the last cold snap of April — 'Babes in the Wood.'"

He found several nests of the tent-caterpillar on the bushes and disposed of them by twisting a stick into them or breaking off the branch a nest was on.

The things he had brought from Riverby that he wanted to keep cool he carried down a rough ladder into a cave back of his cabin, and as he made the descent or emerged from this cave he reminded me of Robinson Crusoe.

In my acquaintance with Burroughs he often

spoke of Whitman with great warmth of affection, both as a man and as a writer, and while we sat on the piazza for an hour or two the "good gray poet" was again a topic of conversation. Burroughs said: "At the time I began living in Washington as a young man I had n't been there long when Walt Whitman strolled into Allen's rubber store, which I made my headquarters, and Allen introduced us.

"It was a happy life — my ten years in Washington. I used to see Whitman nearly every day. He had a sort of attic room in a boarding-house, and I frequently went there. Often we would take a stroll along Pennsylvania Avenue — sometimes by day, sometimes by moonlight. As a correspondent for the New York 'Times' he earned enough to support him, and if he had any surplus during the war it went to the soldiers. Saving was not natural for him. He lived a careless, easy life, and went around like a man of infinite leisure. He had none of the smart business ways of the average American. His hair and beard were gray, and his clothing was gray. All together he made a large gray object you could see half a mile away.

"Whitman often ate his Sunday-morning breakfast at our house. He was quite partial to my wife's cooking, but exasperated her by never getting to the house on time. We'd see him swing off the horse-car and wend his way toward the house, with the

rolling, sailor-like gait that was characteristic of him; and no matter how late he was his own equanimity was not in the least ruffled. My wife's good-humor was quickly restored. She could n't help liking him. No woman could help that.

"He was very fond of one of the horse-car drivers, a young ex-Confederate soldier named Peter Doyle. I think Doyle had been brought to a hospital a prisoner, and that Walt, in his ministering to the soldiers, had found him there. Walt was a big, calm sort of man, full of fine, wholesome instincts. He liked any honest, level-headed fellow, and he would ride several miles standing on the front platform of the horse-car with Doyle. Probably they would n't say much on the whole ride, but the good human companionship was a sufficient satisfaction. When I saw Whitman riding with Doyle, and he greeted me with a wave of his hand, I was very apt to get on and ride with them.

"He left Washington just before I did and made his home in Camden, New Jersey, where he died in 1892. I used to go to Camden to see him each year. He was the sanest, sweetest man I've ever known—human, brotherly, typical, symbolical. No other writer approaches him as a stimulant to my intellect. What an uproar he made among the critics! As a rule they did n't approve of him.

"The trend of his mind was shown in his reading. He read the ancients—the Bible, and the old Oriental

bards — and he read Kant and Hegel and Scott's 'Border Minstrels.' He did n't own many books. When he had got what he wanted from a book, he gave it away.

"His clothing was simple and unconventional, and he did n't put on anything different even at gatherings where you were expected to have on a dress-suit. Dress-suits — I hate 'em! We got that ridiculous style of dress from England, I suppose. It's entirely unnatural, and on that account the dress-suit business gets on my nerves. No, Walt Whitman would n't have worn one. You always saw him in his gray clothes that were in entire keeping with the man.

"He was poor, and I contributed money and got others to do so to save him from want in his old age. Some of his admirers gathered a fund of six thousand dollars and gave it to him to build a house, but he used it to build a tomb. There I thought he showed a weakness. An ostentatious, expensive tomb did n't harmonize with the simplicity of the man himself.

"Horace Traubel was with him a good deal in his later years, and wrote his life and reported Whitman's comments on all sorts of things in great detail. But he had no sense of proportion. There was some real gold, of course, but it was almost lost in an overwhelming amount of the commonplace. Besides, every time Whitman used a swear-word Traubel



put it in, and so gave the impression that Whitman was profane and coarse, which was not true.

“Traubel was a worshiper of Whitman, and he tried to write poetry like him, but he only copied the master’s style, and produced words, not ideas. It was just an intellectual dysentery. Once I got a letter from a man who wanted to make up a purse to help Traubel along, but I did n’t care to contribute. He wrote such gush and rot I’d have given a purse to have him stop.”

In the early evening one of the swamp-side cliff-dwellers came with her little dog “Woggles,” and called at Slabsides. The dog put on an air of bravado and barked and tried to make the Slabsides cat vacate.

Burroughs laughed, and said to the dog: “That’s pure bluff, Woggles. You’re shaking in your shoes. You know you are.”

The caller brought a dish of Indian pudding she had left over from dinner, and Burroughs gave her some gelatine he had made.

It was such a warm evening that we ate our supper on the piazza.

We were up early the next morning, and Burroughs started his oil stove and cooked oatmeal and boiled some eggs. After breakfast we walked down to Riverby, where we found Mrs. Burroughs in her immaculate kitchen. She addressed

him reproachfully, saying: "Yesterday you bought a great piece of steak, after telling me again and again to get a shad in Poughkeepsie; and besides you told your hired man to get a shad for us. So now what are we to do with those two big shad and all that steak, I'd like to know."

Burroughs looked guilty. The problem was too much for him, and we slipped quietly out of the house.

I wanted to get a train on the New York Central, when I prepared to leave later in the morning, and Burroughs had his man row me across the mile-wide Hudson to a station opposite.

## XI

*February, 1901*

### READING AND WRITING

ON the morning that I arrived at Riverby, I learned that Mrs. Burroughs was boarding for the winter at Poughkeepsie. "But I don't like Poughkeepsie," Burroughs said. "I find I can't work there, and I only go down for over Sunday. I have my meals during the week with the hired man's family in the little old farmhouse that my wife and I lived in for a while when I first bought this place."

We visited for the greater part of the day in the bark-covered study, where he had set up a small box stove that kept the room slightly odorous of smoke. Back against the wall was a cot bed.

"That's where I sleep," he explained, "and I spend most of my waking hours in the study, too. There's less elbow room than ever now that I've put in the bed and the stove. Once in a while I get mad and have a cleaning-out here. Things accumulate so that I burn letters, magazines, books — a great mess of them. If I did n't they'd soon monopolize all the space, and I'd have to move out."

We went up to Slabsides through the snowy woods, and when he had looked about he remarked: "I wish

I'd brought a mouse-trap. The mice hold high carnival here in my absence."

We had an evening together in the study until nine, and then we climbed the hill to the farmhouse. Burroughs took a kitchen lamp and guided me up a narrow stairway and along a passage to a low-ceiled chamber which the encroaching roof diminished on either side; and there I slept.

On this visit I asked Burroughs about his literary likes and dislikes, and what chance, or efforts of his own, had led to his gaining the place he held among our writers.

He replied: "I was always fond of books, and in that respect was unlike any of the other members of the family at the old farm. I never received much cultural help from my boyhood associates. You might think I would have got something in that line from my teachers, but they were of the mechanical sort and only taught the regular routine.

"There was a district library in our neighborhood — forty or fifty volumes of adventure, history, and travel — books of long ago. These were my first reading outside of schoolbooks. One of them I know contained accounts of the War of 1812. I used to gloat over and feed on the stories of the sea fights in it. The fight between the Wasp and the Hornet particularly appealed to me. I remember that well.

"Another book was 'Murphy, the Indian Killer.' I read it again and again. How I was thrilled by





*Writing at Slabsides*



*Getting Dinner*

Murphy's brave deeds in fighting the savages and the Tories! There was a life of Washington, too, that made a deep impression.

"Reading was a pleasure to me from the first, but putting ideas in writing was something of a hardship to me as long as I attended the district school. I did n't begin to find enjoyment in trying to express myself on paper until I was about sixteen and had gone away from home to study at an academy. Writing compositions was one of the requirements there. Only one boy stood higher in it than I did. He became a Methodist minister.

"At the age of eighteen I made a trip to New Jersey, where I unsuccessfully sought a job as a teacher. On my way back to the farm I had to wait several hours in New York City for my boat to start on the voyage up the Hudson. So I went for a ramble about the streets and came across a second-hand bookstore, in which I spent nearly all my money. In fact, I did n't have enough left to pay my way all of the journey home, and was obliged to walk the final twelve miles over the mountains and go without my dinner the last day.

"I bought books that I had n't known existed — bought them because I liked the looks of them. They were all serious reading. I did n't buy novels. I did n't care for them. My inclination has always been strongly toward history, philosophy, and science. That summer I helped on the farm and read

my books. I had Dick's works in two big, fat volumes. They were philosophical — not very deep, but they launched off in a formidable way that I admired very much. One chapter, I know, began like this — 'Man is a compound being. He is composed of body and spirit.'

"My purchases included copies of Shakespeare and some of the other poets, but I was n't struck so much with the poetry as I was with the wit and sense. Shakespeare did n't impress me very forcibly, anyway. His great dramatic power did n't appeal to me. For a long time I placed Pope above him. I did n't see his grandeur until later in life.

"As a reader I have always been attracted by everything of the essay kind, and I bought Dr. Johnson's works because, when I looked into them, they seemed to be solid essay stuff from beginning to end. His 'Rambler' captivated me. The essays all started out with high-sounding sentences which I thought were very felicitous. I did n't want any dillydallying in those days. I began to write something after the Johnson style — tried to make reflections on life. I burned it up afterward, but not that year. Of course it was dreadful trash.

"A letter I wrote on spiritualism was the first thing of mine to be printed. I contributed it to a little Delaware County newspaper in 1856.

"When I was studying at Cooperstown, I one day took from the Seminary library a book by Emerson,



and read his essay on 'The Poet.' I could n't make anything of it, and I tried others of the essays; but they were all the same sort of thing, and I carried the book back.

"A year later I went out to Illinois to teach, and while browsing in a Chicago bookstore happened on Emerson's books again. I looked into them and said to myself: 'Why, this is good! This is what I want.' And I bought the whole set.

"For a long time afterward I lived, moved, and had my being in those books. I was like Jonah in the whale's belly — completely swallowed by them. They were almost my whole intellectual diet for two or three years. I kept my Emerson close at hand and read him everywhere. I would go up under the trees of the sap-bush there at home and read and be moved to tears by the extreme beauty and eloquence of his words. For years all that I wrote was Emersonian. It was as if I was dipped in Emerson.

"I continued to teach in various places, and I worked vacations on the home farm, but, wherever I was, all my spare time was spent reading or writing. A series of short articles of mine was printed in the New York 'Saturday Press,' and I wrote some heavy essays for the New York 'Leader.' The 'Press' was the organ of the Bohemians and free lances, and the 'Leader' was the organ of Tammany Hall, but had a literary department. Neither paid me anything for my contributions — not even the dollar apiece

which I asked. However, that did n't trouble me. I was glad enough to see what I had written in print.

"When I was at the old farm in the summer of 1860 I wrote an essay that I called 'Expression,' and sent it to the 'Atlantic.' Emerson was the bright particular literary star about which I revolved at that time, and I was unconsciously influenced by him in writing my essay. It was stamped with his manner, yet it really came from the inside of me and so had a sort of genuineness and value. In fact, I think it was quite a remarkable thing for a young man of twenty-three to do.

"James Russell Lowell, the editor of the 'Atlantic,' imagined some one was trying to palm off on the magazine an early essay of Emerson's which he had not seen, but, after investigating and satisfying himself that such was not the case, he accepted it. I was greatly elated when a check came for thirty dollars — five dollars a page. I shall never forget that check. I thought I was launched then and I wrote with more ardor than ever, but the next essay I sent to the 'Atlantic' came back. Most of what I submitted to other periodicals met the same fate.

"Thus far there had been little originality in my writing. I would be impressed by what I read in some book, and then I would write an essay that would be a kind of echo of my reading. Now I realized that I ought to have an individuality of my own. So I abandoned the Emersonian style and the

philosophical themes and began dealing with rustic topics like haying, sugar-making, and stone walls. Nevertheless, a suggestion of Emerson often crops out in my writings to this day. His beautiful soul shines like a star in our literary firmament. He and Whitman and Carlyle were the three men who appealed to me more than any others of my time.

“I wrote considerable poetry as a young man, but the verse form of expression hampered my thought. Rhyme and rhythm never flowed through my mind easily. My poems seemed to me manufactured rather than spontaneous, and a time came when I wrote no more poetry and destroyed most of what I had done previously.

“Three of my early poems found their way into print. One of them was addressed to a friend who had been visiting me at the old farm. When he went away, it left me kind of sentimental and lonesome, I suppose, and I put my feelings into verse. Another poem, entitled ‘Loss and Gain,’ came out in the ‘Independent.’ ‘Waiting’ was the name I gave the third, and that has become well known. I can’t say as much for any of the other verses I have written, either in my youth or later when I resumed writing poetry. So I am practically a man of a single poem.

“‘Waiting’ dates back to 1862, when I was twenty-five. I was not prospering, the outlook was anything but encouraging, and it was a very gloomy period of my life. Besides, the Civil War was raging.

I was thinking I ought to join the army, but my wife was very much opposed to that, and so were my folks. I was teaching school at Olive in Ulster County and was reading medicine in the office of the village doctor with the notion of becoming a physician. One evening, as I sat in the little back room of the doctor's office, I paused in my study of anatomy, and wrote the poem, which begins—

“Serene, I fold my hands and wait,  
Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea;  
I rave no more 'gainst Time or Fate,  
For lo! my own shall come to me.’

“The poem was written as a comfort to myself and it was more felt and more spontaneous than anything else I ever put into verse. Because it voiced a real feeling, it has touched others. The idea that what is good for us will come, and that we need not be uneasy or in haste, has proved true in my own case. Much good has come to me that I had no reason to expect—come just as a matter of luck in the unfolding of the great world life.

“I’ve got many things by indirection. The first hummingbird’s nest I ever found was found by chance. I was fishing down a little stream in the woods and my hook got caught in the limb of a tree. When I pulled down my line, there was the nest on the branch. Yes, much good comes to me without forethought. I don’t compel it to come. I don’t get it by force. It floats in on me some way, independent of my mind and will.



“The theme of the poem accorded with the religious ideas of my people. They were Old School Baptists who believed in predestination, foreordination, and that sort of thing. I inherited their feeling, but I was n’t so theological. It took the shape with me that you see in the poem. It is predestination watered down, or watered up.

“‘Waiting’ was published in the ‘Knickerbocker Magazine,’ but it attracted no attention until, many years later, Whittier put it in his ‘Songs of Three Centuries.’ Since then it has kept floating around and has won wide popularity. Every once in a while it makes a tour of the newspapers. Sometimes they give it a new title, or drop my name, or change lines, or add verses, or subtract them. Recently the ‘Congregationalist’ printed it under the title ‘Serenity’ and credited it to the ‘British Weekly.’ In the usual version there is one less verse than in the original. But that verse was unnecessary and the poem is stronger without it.

“Some time ago a Rhode Island manufacturer printed the poem in a leaflet to hand about. I suppose doing that was a relief to him from the grind of business. I understand that the Theosophists swear by the poem. I hear from it a great deal. People say to me, ‘That poem has been more to me than anything else in my life.’ They almost sleep with it under their pillows. The religious people are particularly fond of it. A minister wrote to me the

other day of how it had 'steadied his hand at the helm' and that sort of thing.

"I did n't start into the bird business until the spring of 1863. I was twenty-five or twenty-six years old before birds began to interest me much. At that time I was teaching near West Point, and one day I went to the West Point library saying to myself that I'd know something about birds. I was fortunate enough to strike a copy of Audubon, and he opened a new world to me. He had adventures with birds, and I could n't resist the contagion of his delight.

"I went into the woods with new interest, new enthusiasm. The locality was very rich in bird life, and as soon as my eyes were opened a little, I found new birds everywhere. My vision was sharpened, and birds I'd passed by before I saw now at once. Besides, the current no sooner started to flow in that direction than I discovered that I could recall all the birds I'd known as a boy. There they were, photographed on my memory. Audubon turned my mind in the bird direction and brought all I'd observed to the surface.

"That fall, in the first flush of my pleasure studying birds, I wrote my first nature essay.

"About 1859, when I was contributing to the 'Saturday Press,' I ran across some of Walt Whitman's poems which appeared in the same paper, and they attracted me instantly. My first book, pub-

lished in 1867 while I was living in Washington, was about him.

“I was a clerk in the Treasury Department. The work was light. All I had to do was to keep track of the money that went in and out of a vault I guarded. Sometimes I would n’t be occupied over half an hour in a whole day, and as I sat at my high mahogany desk facing the iron wall of the vault, I had much time to think my own thoughts and to write about nature. The vault gave me a good surface to rebound from, and my fancy bounded back to green things.

“I wrote from recollection. There was no dependence on notes. I never could write from notes. I have to write from a fresh impulse. The things that belong to me stick to me. It was in the Treasury that I wrote my first nature book, ‘Wake-Robin,’ which appeared in 1871, when I was thirty-four years old. This and other nature books that I produced as the years passed gradually gave me a reputation as a literary naturalist.

“After I established myself beside the Hudson, I did my writing for a time in the stone house. Then I erected my little outdoor study to get congenial seclusion for putting my thoughts on paper.

“Most of my writing has been done in the fall and winter. I write very little in the spring. I seldom write anything but letters in May, and I don’t seriously begin work until July. I guess I’m too

sappy in the springtime. I'm like the trees — the sap starts running, things are in their formative stage, and it's a time to soak up and absorb. I lie around under the genial influence of the earth and sky, and I hear the birds sing and find out what they are doing.

"I use ordinary steel stub pens for writing, and my favorite penholders are those I make myself of cat-tails. I gather the cat-tails in the swamp, and when the stems are dry, I cut them up into the proper lengths. These penholders are very light, and I can easily push the pens into the pith. Once I got a fountain pen and used it two or three days. Then I went back to my beloved cat-tail. That suited me best.

"As I became better known to the public, I'd get invitations to go to all sorts of places, and sometimes I went, but oftener I did n't. One such invitation took me up to Twilight Park, but I could n't stand it and had to fly. The folks there wanted me to be clever, and they kept me on the stretch all the time. They thought that a man who was a writer could be unfailingly brilliant without an effort. 'Oh!' they'd say, 'he's the feller. Go for him. He's chuck full of wit.'

"But I have no social gifts. I was just a stick at their parties. I could n't go skating lightly along over things the way they expected me to. The last scheme they got going up there was to write some



epitaphs to put on a lot of stumps in one of the fields of the vicinity. I don't go loaded, and I could n't have written an epitaph such as they wanted to save my life. So I came away in a hurry.

"I'm not a ready writer in a professional sense. I can't write fiction at all, but must confine myself to that which I personally see or feel. If I go for a ramble in the woods, it's not to gather material for an essay. No, I go to poke about and enjoy myself.

"Nor have I taken kindly to suggested topics for articles. The thing I'm asked to write about is just the thing I don't want to write about. But occasionally, when the request was in harmony with my own interests, and especially if the hook was baited, I've supplied the article. Money in itself, however, has never been the inducement that has called forth my writings for periodicals or book publishers; and, in time, the circulation that my books attained paid me better than if I'd written pot-boilers.

"Last autumn I went to Cambridge to spend a few months, and while there I edited a collection of nature poems. I was n't able to find anything in verse about certain of the birds and flowers that I thought ought to be represented, or else nothing that was true to the facts. So I said to myself, 'Now you know about these things; why don't you write about them yourself?' So I got to making rhymes, and I wrote fourteen poems, so called. It was a bad attack, but presently it was over and I was ready for prose again.

"Recently I've been taking down some of my old books in the study here — books written many generations ago. They have long been favorites of mine; and after all it is the old books — the classics — that are best.

"I've reread Boswell's 'Johnson' several times. It is so filled with the presence of the living man that it has almost the charm of the spoken word. A similar book, which I never tire of, is Eckermann's 'Conversations with Goethe.' It is very suggestive — very rich. I always find something new in it.

"There's much in the letters of Edward Fitzgerald that appeals to me. He lived a very simple life, although he had ample means; and he had such a liking for seclusion that he seldom saw even his closest friends and relations. We find him saying in a letter, after the death of a brother, 'I have not been inside his gate for three years, yet I loved him and he loved me.' He did n't want the current of his life interrupted by going visiting or being visited. He was very shy, and the shyness creeps out in his letters. They are written without any attempt to write, and are delightful.

"Very few people write good letters. Robert Louis Stevenson did pretty well in a way, but there is n't much meat or substance to them. Perhaps that is because he never was alone. He had great social talent — the very thing from which Fitzgerald shrank.

"A good book of travel like Kennan's 'Tent Life in Siberia' always attracts me. It has a flavor like an onion compared with the frozen turnip of the average novel. Parkman's 'Oregon Trail' has similar charm. Then there is Darwin's 'Naturalist's Voyage Round the World,' which I read again and again. All Darwin's works have a human and almost poetic side. He makes you feel the fascination of the power and mystery of nature.

"Aside from Whitman, the poet I go to oftenest is Wordsworth. I take down Emerson oftener than any other New England poet. I've been looking through Bryant. A great deal of what he wrote is rather slow and ponderous, but there's some real poetry — his 'Waterfowl,' for instance, and 'Thanatopsis.' No poet is always inspired and elevated. Even Wordsworth is so only once in a while.

"White's 'Natural History of Selborne' I did n't read till I was nearly forty. I had long known of the book, but never got to really read it before. It made me want to see his village. It's a book to sip, a book to let linger on the tongue. It's a book for the fire-side and quiet contemplation. Then you get the sweetness of it and feel its simple, wholesome quality. It does n't jibe with hurry and heat and business strife. I like to pick it up in the autumn. When I first build my study fire at the approach of cold weather, I enjoy taking White's 'Selborne' and reading a little. Yes, it's a delicious book.

“Thoreau appealed to me less than Gilbert White. I must have been about twenty when I read his ‘Walden.’ Its crispness and pungency appealed to me, and I envied the writer’s indifference to human beings. I have always read him with keen interest, but I don’t owe him any great debt.

“John Muir is an able writer, but he is n’t to be put alongside of Thoreau. He has n’t Thoreau’s art or style. There’s a great deal of glorification of scenery in what he writes. ‘Glorious’ is one of his favorite words. His laudation is good, but you tire of it. He is no philosopher, and the old Scotch Presbyterianism clings to him and hampers him. He is crazy about trees and wild scenes. He is mountain-drunk — that’s what he is!

“We have some excellent American writers on nature who love the things of which they tell us. Most nature authors, however, evidently start out saying to themselves, ‘Now I want to write a book.’ That’s their first thought.

“I’m glad that in my youth I escaped the flood of cheap fiction that now submerges the reading public. We Americans are getting so we do no serious reading. But stories never have appealed to me nearly as strongly as reality, and yet I think I’m a good novel-reader when I start. The starting is the trouble. I’m like a boy going in swimming — I hesitate and hold myself back, but after the first plunge it’s fine. I think I always laugh in the right



places. At least, I know I always cry in the right places. Yet as I get older it's harder and harder for me to feel interest in the merely fanciful.

"The 'Vicar of Wakefield' gave me pleasure when I first read it, and I return to it with satisfaction. I never could read Cooper. He seems crude and artificial. In my youth I enjoyed Scott, the delight of all generous boys. I liked Irving too. He was a very genial, human man, but I don't read him any more. I have found great pleasure in Hawthorne. His style does n't obtrude. It has the quality of obliterating itself, and has atmosphere, which is something you don't find in the works of most American novelists.

"I can't read Dickens. To me he has an air of insincerity and make-believe. What his characters do and say is transparent acting.

"As for the modern novelists, I can hardly force myself to read them. Perhaps I ought to except Barrie. He's a capital fellow. I enjoyed his 'Window in Thrums.'

"It seems to me strange, the antagonism many of our writers, especially the younger men, feel toward Mr. Howells. I think his views of literature are unimpeachable. I agree with him that the artist must be true, the first thing he does. He must make what he relates like the reality, to begin with. Then he can give his imagination rein. If you have a feeling about anything, let us have it. You may not be an

artist, and your work will fail on that account; but, however that may be, it's only your own impressions that have any value.

"Talk about the ancients! Why should we pattern after them? They painted things as they knew and saw them. They produced themselves. They looked inward, not outward. That's why their work had power. They did n't go tagging after some bygone civilization. Neither should we.

"That a book should be real is a prime essential; and besides there should be a charm derived from the personality of the writer. An artist must have an atmosphere that bathes the scene he describes, and this must come from his own individuality.

"I wonder if Howells knows how much he offends the women by his portrayal of them. He lays so much stress on their weaknesses and lacks that they are down on him almost without exception.

"I've read his 'World of Chance.' The reality of it is astonishing. I could smell New York. I could hear the rattle of the streets. There were just such people in the book as I've seen on the elevated trains. But he did n't make me care for them. I wished we had more of Mr. Howells there. He could afford to give himself to his readers much more freely than he does.

"Another of his novels that I read was 'The Day of Their Wedding,' but with only languid interest. It is a photograph of small, commonplace things.

One day I bought his 'London Films,' but when I looked into it I quickly concluded that it was too filmy for me and sent it back. I loved him a good deal better after reading his New England recollections, because I got closer to him and he dealt with people who in general had attractive personalities.

"I wish Howells had come to live near me beside the Hudson. I think he might if it had n't been so far from New York. He's fond of the country. One of the frequent sights on the river is a colony of canal-boats in tow behind a tug. Families live on board them, and you can see the washing flying. If Howells had lived where I do, he'd have used that life in some way. What a pretty romance a man of his delicate perceptions could make out of it!

"I get considerable periodical literature, but delve into it with a good deal of caution. Most of it seems made for people who have an idle hour. If one does n't look out these days he gets snowed under with it — completely clogged. I'm really thankful when I can look through a magazine table of contents and find nothing that I feel I must read."

## XII

*September, 1901*

### SLABSIDES IN THE WOODS

ON my next visit to Burroughs I spent a day and a night at Slabsides with him. The weather was chilly, and in the evening we had a good fire blazing on the hearth. My companion occasionally poked the fire and adjusted the burning sticks.

He asked me which I thought was the better of two titles he was considering for his next book. Most of his books seem to me to be named very felicitously, and the titles of the individual essays often have a piquant charm that is quite enticing.

"I've been living here since early spring," he said, "except when I was up at the old Catskills home in the summer. I used to help my brother's family in the haying, but I go there to rest and relax now. I like to sit on the front steps or lie in the hammock under the maples that shadow the house. I've done very little work on the old farm the last two years. Every day I would go for a long walk with the dogs for company. I would climb the great hill behind the house — and a hard climb it is — and each morning I would wash my hands and face just as I did when I was a boy in what I call the 'big



wash-basin' — the tank that receives the flow of spring water at the back door."

He was in a reminiscent mood and our conversation drifted into a recalling of the story of Slabsides. "It was in 1894," he said, "that I got interested in the swamp back here in the rough woodland. It looked quite barbaric with its brush and stumps and muddy pools, but I could see that the land was very rich and only needed clearing and draining to be capable of yielding wonderful crops. So I induced a rich man of the neighborhood who owned the swamp to take hold of the work; for what better use can be made of surplus money than to improve the face of the earth by making it more productive? He had the trees and brush cut off, the stumps and roots pulled up, and ditches dug along the borders of the swamp to carry off the water. That was a good start, but the stumps and rubbish lay there in a chaos that looked like the wreck of worlds. I tried to have the man set fire to the stuff, and he would n't because he was afraid the fire might spread to the woods.

"When winter came he hired three young men to clear the swamp, and they built a hut of unplanned boards among the trees near by. They rigged up the inside with a stove and a little furniture, and there they lived. But they had been at work only a week when, one morning, their hut blew up. The roof flew off, the boards on the sides were splintered or

broken away, and the stove was smashed. The three young men all happened to be outside at the time. If they'd been in the hut, they'd have been killed instantly. They were from a town some distance away, and the West Park hoodlums resented having the swamp work done by outsiders. To make the matter clear to the intruders, some of them had put dynamite down the stovepipe. The young men were frightened and discouraged and threw up their job. Probably they got nothing for their week's work because they did n't complete their contract.

"The owner of the swamp was worth seven millions. He had no children to inherit his money, and he certainly could n't take it with him when he died. What a pity that he should be so timid in his use of it and so close in his bargains! I thank Heaven that I'm not rich — riches are so apt to dry up a man's sympathies.

"Things had come to a standstill in the woodland hollow, and my next move was to make a deal with a young farmer commonly known as 'Amasy' to help me reclaim the swamp and raise crops on it. I bought a hundred acres there in the woods, turned eighty over to Amasy, and retained the rest, including the swamp, for myself. We made a road over the ridge to connect with the highway that went down to the village. Next we civilized the swamp, which was a three-acre level rimmed around with rock. By blasting an outlet in this rim, we got rid of a good deal of the surplus water.

"It cost me sixty dollars an acre to clear off the brush, stumps, and roots. No doubt the swamp had been chopped over many times, for in one spot we found a little pile of cordwood directly under the stump of a large tree. The tree had grown right over the pile and must have started growing at least a hundred years before. Close by, three feet under the muck, we dug up a Dutch gin bottle in which some old-time workman had carried his drink to the woods. We had to be very careful not to let the fire get away from us when we were burning the rubbish in dry weather. It did escape once, and we had a terrific time fighting it. If a shower had n't come to our aid, it would have spread no one knows how far.

"I early discovered on the borders of the swamp two springs of delicious cold water. It seemed to me as good as Catskill water, and I came up from Riverby nearly every day to get a drink. Never before had I gone through a hard summer's work and kept so well as I did that year, and I attribute my thriving in large part to the water of those springs. The nymph of one of the springs was very shy, for the water got rily when you came to the edge and looked in. This was because the soil was porous and shaky, and your footsteps affected the channels of the water down under the surface. To cure the defect, I took a keg, knocked out the ends, and set it down around the spring.

"From a shoulder of rock at one side of the swamp

a very fine echo is to be had when atmospheric conditions are right. Your voice comes bounding back from the cliff with amazing distinctness, but you are too near for long remarks. You have to speak quickly if you wish the echo to repeat more than two syllables.

“We got one corner of the swamp cleared up early enough that first season to attempt raising a crop on it. The ground was a black mass of mouldy vegetable matter, and you could dig down anywhere and find water. It was so soft that a horse could n’t walk on it. In order to make ready for planting, I got two men to pull the plough while I followed behind and guided it. If the soil had n’t been very loose and light, I’d have needed more power. The work made the men puff, but we turned over quite a piece.

“Then we thought we’d try a horse, and we fastened some squares of board on his hoofs — put the horse on snowshoes, so to speak. We expected he would be troubled by his new footgear at first, but he got the hang of it at once. He seemed to understand that he must walk wide. So he spread himself accordingly, and flap, flap, he went, up and down the field. We planted some potatoes, and set out a good-sized patch of celery. I planned to put the whole swamp to celery the next year and was confident I could make a good many hundred dollars. But I foresaw that the time when it would prove a real gold mine would be in a dry year. I said to my-



self: 'I ain't praying for it, but I'll be ready when it comes.' You see I could always keep my swamp moist by regulating the flow at the outlet.

"Even if I did n't raise any crops, I calculated that the ownership of the swamp made me enormously wealthy. Agricultural authorities say that muck is worth two dollars a load, and I had millions of loads in my swamp.

"The work of reclaiming that wild land seemed to stir the aboriginal instincts in me, and I found myself longing for a wigwam or cabin to which I might retire when I was in the mood and live a life of rude simplicity. For more than a score of years I had been perched high on the bank of a great river, in sight of all the world and exposed to every wind that blew, with a horizon-line that swept over half a county.

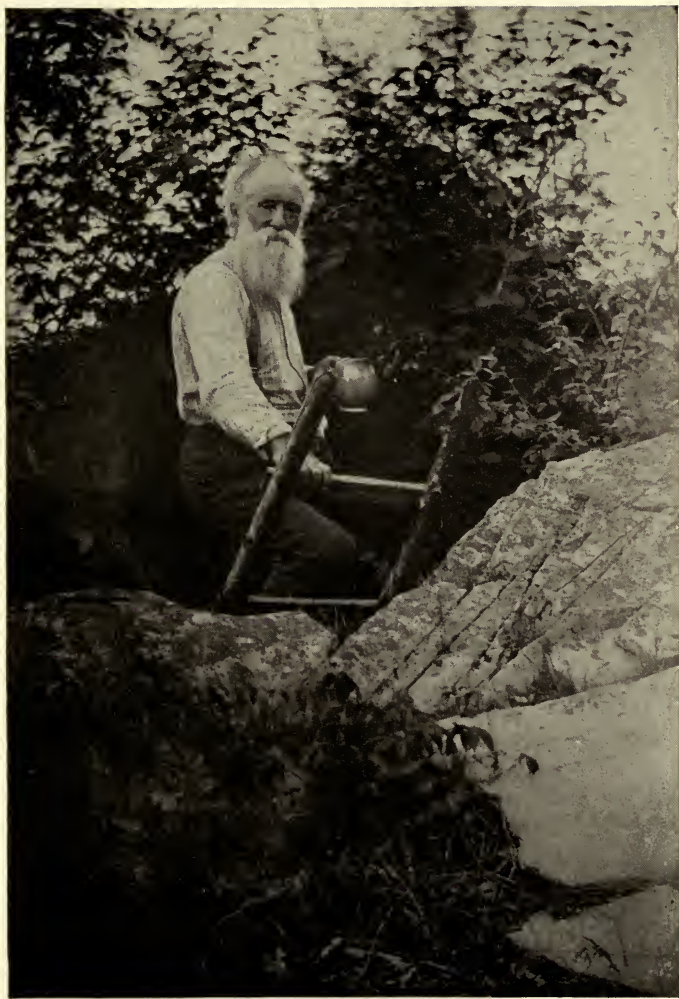
"The publicity of Riverby was n't congenial. I had grown restless and dissatisfied and pined for a different environment where there'd be no river with yachts of millionaires flaunting up and down it, no steamboats, no railroad trains. The Hudson is a great highway. It has n't the domestic and winning qualities that a smaller stream has. Its commercial aspect is always intruding, and the dweller on its banks finds its disturbing sights and sounds continually jarring on his sensibilities.

"So for one reason and another I concluded to withdraw into the wilderness, and I built me this

rustic house. I did all the planning and helped with the mason work and carpentering. The cabin is better than the log house my Grandfather Burroughs built when he moved to Roxbury, and it's better than the log house built by any one else's grandfather. I think if my grandfather appeared and looked over my swamp-side cabin, he would reprove me for living too luxuriously.

“Whoever puts up a house nowadays and wants an open fire ought to build his own chimney. The art of chimney-building is gone out. Our modern architects and masons make chimneys with sole regard to the ornamental effect — not for the purpose of having a good fire. Before I built the one for my cabin, I went around hunting for old chimneys, and I'd poke my head into the fireplaces and look up them. I think I discovered the secret of a good draft. It is to have the throat of the chimney long and narrow and the flue above very big. My chimney is at the end of the cabin and shows outside all the way up. The stones of which it is made were picked up close about. I could n't ask for one that would draw better. If you put a newspaper in the fire the ascending air-current catches it and takes it right up through.

“The chairs, stools, shelves, and other furnishings are my own handiwork, and the material for them is chiefly sticks of Nature's own fashioning which I found right in the woods. The dining-table was per-



*Coming from the Cold-Storage Cavern*



*Water from the Spring*



haps my most ambitious attempt at carpentering, and it was all right except that you could n't get your knees under it. That defect was remedied later.

"You remember I used to store such victuals as I wanted to keep cool in the natural cavern that opens down into the rocks back of the house. I had a ladder for getting in and out of it; but carrying things up and down that was rather inconvenient, and after a while I built a spring-house to serve instead of the cave.

"I'd always wanted to own some sort of a place in the woods. For years I'd been dickering with a man way back in the Catskills. I wanted to put up a log or a stone house there, but he could n't give me a clear title to the land — a glen among the mountains. I was attracted by the purity of the elements there. They were purer than in any other valley in the world. It was a spot untouched by man — water perfect, air perfect, seclusion perfect — could n't be beat anywhere. The brook that flowed through the woods over the washed stones was absolutely clean; and there were mountains on all sides — a great brotherhood of them joining hands and circling about you.

"But my surroundings at Slabsides are a little savager than they would have been in that Catskill valley. There everything is covered with trees and verdure. At Slabsides I am hemmed in by rocks and rugged cliffs. Of course there are places in the

Catskills where the rocks frown on you; but my swamp gives me a rare combination — you jump at once from beetling crag right down to garden mould; and, though I miss the great trees, this swamp soil, the slow accretion of ages, is to me very suggestive and impressive.

“In fact it has been the land that has given me most pleasure in my wilderness home. It looks different from other land. It is land I have made and is much more precious than any I could buy. Before I took hold of it there was nothing in this hollow of the woods except a bit of untamed nature, and my land was buried beneath trees, stumps, and bog. I had to fight for it, and land you get that way you value. Yes, it is wonderful land — land I’ve created myself. If some one had given me a nice piece of tillable land, I would n’t have thought anything of it as compared with my swamp.

“Some of my friends were troubled because I called my cabin Slabsides. Most people imagined the name was a joke. Those who thought I was in earnest protested. They said such a name was too slangy — too rough. But there is nothing disagreeable or unpoetic about a slab, and as slabs are the most conspicuous feature of the cabin construction, why should n’t the dwelling take its name from them? I could n’t give it a pretty name like Rock Haven or Echo Lodge. Cragfoot was suggested, and that is n’t bad — still, it’s a little too pretentious.

"Give a place an ugly name and the name always sticks. That's an advantage — and after a time the crudeness wears away and the name comes to have some other association. Slabsides has a Western flavor. They give real names out there — names full of rugged meaning. But you take genteel people with money, and they can't stand that sort of thing. If I could have got a good birch name, I would have liked it, but nothing exactly suitable occurred to me. There's a good flavor about birch. I felt the birch when I was young and I've had a sentiment of attachment for it ever since.

"The first time I visited the swamp I saw a coon not far from where I put up my house. I don't know but that ought to have given the place a name. Coon Hollow — how would that do?

"The name I selected was n't one that the natives of the region stumbled over or made any mistakes about. I had a rough-and-ready place, with which a rough-and-ready name was in perfect harmony. I would n't have anything that had the least taint of sentimentalism or affectation, and I think a coarse-fibered designation like Slabsides grows constantly more significant and pleasing. A name wants to be something like your boots or your coat — not too good to wear every day. It's a great mistake to give babies or homes fancy names. A pretty name always suggests effeminacy some way or other.

"I built Slabsides for a place of occasional retire-

ment when I got sick of the more civilized world. Also I thought it would be a good place for my friends to hibernate in. But I stayed here a good deal of the time in the summer and fall of '96 right after its erection. My wife had found difficulty in getting a girl to suit her, and she complained of the amount of housework she had to do. So I said I'd halve the work by going over to Slabsides to live, and that arrangement seemed to suit her very well. The next year I made my home here almost without a break beginning the latter part of March.

"An article in a New York magazine said that I went to Slabsides to stay because Mrs. Burroughs swept me out of the house at Riverby. Of course that was a humorous exaggeration, but she is an immaculate housekeeper, and there's no question that with my easy-going habits I sometimes got in her way. I fail in various essentials, as she views things, to come up to her standard, and she does n't hesitate to point out my failings."

(On an earlier occasion Burroughs said: "A scolding woman I can't stand. When a woman begins to scold, I take to the woods.")

The remark had no reference to Slabsides, though he very likely had Mrs. Burroughs in mind. To "take to the woods" simply meant that he got out of the disturbed area as quickly as possible.)

"When I went up to Slabsides in the first mild weather of March to stay until the next winter, I had



the grip, but the air and water and simple living soon cured me. Every day I went down to the village for my mail, and, before I returned, I spent an hour or two at Riverby to keep track of things there. I always walked back and forth. I'd given up keeping a horse. It was too much trouble. I like a horse if some one else drives and takes care of him. Apparently I was made to be a gentleman. Looking after a horse is n't to my taste. Cleaning him, for instance, simply transfers the dirt from the horse to you, and the horsy smell hangs about you for a week.

"I did n't lock my cabin at first. I had a latch-string on the front door, and the place was free to all whether I was there or not. 'Go in, look around, and help yourselves,' the house said; and the natives did drift in some to see what they could see. There were no gold watches in it and no silverware, and I used to say, 'You must n't have wealth and then you won't be robbed.' But some of my stuff was taken later and I felt obliged to put locks in the doors.

"When I'd lived in the cabin about six months, I undertook to mop the floor. It was a new venture and not altogether a success. First I rubbed soap on the grease-spots, then poured on hot water, then sozzled the mop up and down in a pail of water and afterward wrung it out into the pail. Next I swashed it around on the floor, and lastly, I sopped up the

moisture that remained, just as I had seen my mother do, long ago. I left a good deal of the candle-wicking that the mop was made of sticking in the slivers of the floor boards. As you mop, you don't want to walk where you have cleaned, but I got myself in a corner and could n't retreat. That was poor tactics — poor housewifery. When you keep house yourself, you come to appreciate these little points of management by which you come out right. I concluded I should know better how to mop next time — if there ever was a next time.

“That mopping was a good deal like the experience I had at Riverby in making a cherry pudding once when my wife was away. I'd seen her do it a good many times. She used canned cherries and cooked them with a crust on top. I poured my cherries in and then stirred the dough all right, though I did get my hands badly stuck up, but when it came to putting the dough into place for a crust, I could n't make it float. I got so I could handle the dough pretty well, but no sooner did I let go of it than it plunged down into the cherry juice out of sight. I tried again and again. I had the science of the thing correct enough, but I had n't the art. Finally I gave up and baked it as it was with the crust somewhere down in the juice. The cherries turned out first-rate, but the crust was a mess that the dog could n't eat.

“I did things very much simpler at Slabsides. If

I wanted a cherry pudding, I soaked some crackers, put the cherries on them, and there I had my pudding. The crackers did for crust, and it tasted very good.

“You know my brother Hiram. He’s two years my senior, and was the oldest of the children in my boyhood home. He excelled in a good many rustic tasks, but he was a dreamer and could n’t make farming pay. He was n’t cut out to succeed. He’s enthusiastic, moody, visionary, rash. He has all the weaknesses of a man of genius without the genius.

“After father’s death he tried to run the old farm, but he had no business acumen and everybody took advantage of him. Besides, he was always getting some wild notion into his head — he’d send off to Canada for a hundred-dollar sheep, or go into some other extravagance. He was a bachelor and not very energetic, and things kept going downhill. I had gone on a note for four or five thousand dollars in order to prevent the farm from going out of the family. But that did n’t mend matters, and I was obliged to take the place out of Hiram’s hands.

“My wife had protested against my going on the note, and I knew pretty well, myself, I should lose, but the affair concerned my brother and my old home, and that was where my sentiment got the better of my business capacity. The transaction alienated my brother too — he could see things

only in his own light — and I was very sorry, for I loved him.

“However, his view became mellower later, and the trouble healed. He took to keeping bees on quite a large scale, and I know one year he was expecting to make three or four hundred dollars out of them, but the season was very bad for bees in the Catskills and they did n’t store enough honey to carry them through the winter. I wished he could bring his beehives down to Riverby and live with me, and I said to myself, ‘If my wife would agree I’d send for him to-morrow,’ but she would n’t hear of such a thing.

“After I’d been staying at Slabsides a few months, I told him we’d live together here in the woods. He was entirely out of money and would have gone to the poorhouse if I had n’t taken him. He brought a few hens and about forty skips of bees to Slabsides, and he had those bees so much on his mind that he was continually running off to fuss with them in the busiest days of grape-cutting, when he was needed to help me. Besides, he was corresponding with other bee-fanciers and swapping queens with them, and fooling around with improvements that wiped out all the profits. He’d pile his boxes of honey in the corner of the cabin living-room and leave the little cages for queen bees lying around on the chairs, and he’d write bee memoranda in chalk on the walls.

“I was the food-provider, the cook, and the house-



keeper. He was forgetful and careless and would live on next to nothing rather than bother to get a meal himself. I'd scold him for not thinking of any of the things that needed doing, but my words were wasted. Sometimes I'd have a little fun telling him he ought to get married, and that there was a widow in the village who had her eye on him. However, he'd always been a bachelor, and you could n't get him within ten miles of the lady.

"We had little enough in common, but the tie of kinship was strong and we were glad to be together.

"Hiram and I did n't spend much time over housework here in the woods. We studied to economize labor. We used wooden plates that were good for two or three meals. Then we'd throw them in the fire. To be sure they were thin and rather wobbly, and if you put anything wet on them they'd warp a little before we got done eating — still, they served very well.

"When I first began to live here, I ate my dinner with a newspaper for a tablecloth, but I kept making improvements, and later covered my table with a white oilcloth. I got white oilcloth on purpose to make me feel compelled to keep it clean for the sake of appearances, if for nothing else. There's an immense saving in the Slabsides way of living. I don't have to go through any doors to get my victuals to the dining-room, as would be the case in most houses. No, I can fetch my steak or chops from the coals to the table in two jumps.

"I usually spend my mornings indoors, reading, writing, and thinking. About eleven o'clock I put my potatoes cooking, and at twelve I broil my meat and set on the dinner. If I am going to have beans instead of meat and potatoes, I start them at eight o'clock; and while I bake my intellectual beans my other beans are sizzling and ripening in the pot. Yes, sir! I can live here like a philosopher.

"When anybody comes to call and I see he is going to stay to dinner, I slyly slip an extra potato into the ashes and go on with the conversation. By and by I step out to the spring, where I have my larder sunken in the cold water, get my shad or a steak or some chops, and have dinner ready before the caller knows what has happened.

"Afternoons I always walk through the woods, or help the men I've hired to take care of the swamp-land crops. Just a little back in the woods is a crick called the Shattega. It's very wild and picturesque as it winds through the forest, with the tall trees on each side reflected in the quiet water. If you keep along it for a while you come to an oval sheet of water a half-mile across known as Black Pond.

"On the crick I formerly had a boat — one I'd built and used in 1877 to make a voyage down the Pepacton from the Catskills. My dog and I often went to the boat and had a row. The dog would get very much excited about my paddling and sometimes he'd jump overboard to seize my oar. Then I'd take him



*Black Pond, a Favorite Resort near Slabsides*



*The "Hermit of Slabsides"*



by the nape of the neck and lift him back into the boat, and he'd shake the wetness out of his hair over everything, and I'd have to give him a scolding.

"The boat has met with disaster. Some boys took it and let it float downstream, and when I found it the bottom was stove in.

"I go to the crick in May to hear the pine warblers and the water-thrushes. At the same time I see flocks of rusty blackbirds. They collect there in troops and have their concerts, and they are so tame that when I had my boat they'd let me row by close enough to see their yellow eyes. Now and then I catch a glimpse of a muskrat or a mink. It is a favorite resort of wild ducks of many different kinds. I've seen the stream alive with them. An otter family has its home somewhere along the crick, and when I go there in winter I see their tracks on the snow, but I've never seen the creatures themselves.

"A great many people come to call on me at Slabsides, some by appointment and some without, some old friends and some strangers I'd never heard of. The young folks from the village are often over to picnic with me, and if celery is in season, I go out and bring in an armful from the swamp and we have a celery feast. Yes, company is pretty constant all through the warm weather. People come singly, in couples, in squads, and they come in clubs and schools. Feminine visitors are especially abundant, partly because the Vassar College girls at Pough-

keepsie have got the notion of calling frequently. The visitors have increased from year to year till they are something of a burden. There's considerable spells when no day is without them. The place has a romantic appeal to their fancy, apparently. Why, two young artists were married on my piazza!

"Among my visitors last year was Teddy Roosevelt, Jr. He stayed from Friday night to Monday noon and the boy wore me out with his energy. How he did scramble up the trees and the face of the cliffs, and how delighted he was with Slabsides, and what disgust he expressed with everything citified and un-American! The little fellow amused me very much, he was so like a miniature copy of his father in his ideas and manners.

"Another visitor who came and stopped over Sunday was John Muir. He is a poet, prophet, man of science — a wonderful fellow. We forgot to eat and sleep, and time slipped past unnoticed — all on account of his delightful talk. He is the incarnation of the spirit of the mountains. There's a far-away look in his face and eyes as if he saw the heights and peaks beckoning to him. You miss in his books his personality and the spontaneity that glows in his talk. Some people have the gift of putting themselves in what they write. But Muir has n't it. You don't get his best on the printed page.

"He is looking everywhere through the country for marks of the ice overflow, and no matter where

he searches he finds those marks. When he was a young fellow he attended a Western college, and not long after he finished his course he started out for a walk. He did n't stop till he reached Florida, and he did n't get back home for eighteen years. He wanted to see what God was doing in the world, and he'd only got an inkling of it in college.

"Now he has a fruit farm in California, and he's prosperous. He says he can make money anywhere, and that he has so much he does n't know what he's worth. He is n't tied to his farm. From there he goes up to Alaska nearly every summer to live among the glaciers. When he gets sick, all he has to do is to go to Alaska and he gets well. Glaciers are his hobby. He can't be long away from them without getting hungry for them. He takes a glacier just as other men take a plate of ice-cream. He knows all about flowers, and he knows geology from beginning to end. You ought to hear him tell his dog story. It is one of the few really good dog stories. But you don't want to ask him to tell it unless you have plenty of time. He takes an hour to go through it, and you get the whole theory of glaciation thrown in, but it is fascinating.

"When I shifted my home to the woods, the robins followed me. Song sparrows and chippies came too: and there are hosts of other birds that are native to the woods. I hear the scarlet tanager near my cabin every day in its song season. The tanager is a wood-

bird and does n't go down into the cultivated land along the Hudson. At the same time the rose-breasted grosbeak is in song with its rich, soft warble, and so is the oven-bird. I like to watch the latter launch into the air. Often it will go up to a height of a hundred feet, and then it bursts into song and descends — just as if it were a rocket — first a vigorous upward flight, then an explosion of song high in air, then the gentle drift back to earth.

“In the spring evenings I hear the piping of the wood frog, the leopard frog, the bullfrog, and, best of all, the song of the toad. The toad's song is a guttural sort of music, but to me it is very sweet. While the old toad vocalizes, it sits half-body deep in the water. Its song is one of thankfulness and good-will. The sound is like the purring of the genii of the twilight. I wish some poet would put the song of the toad in his verses.

“Other animal sounds at night are the voices of the owls and whip-poor-wills. One night I heard a strange whistling, shrill and high-pitched, that I could n't account for. I rather suspect it was made by a coon, but I'm not sure.

“A story circulated at one time that we had a strange varmint there in the woods. People said that the creature had killed a horse in one place, fought with dogs in another, and maimed a calf in a third. It was the talk of all the region for ten days or two weeks, and many persons really believed that



some animal which had escaped from a menagerie was roaming about. The woods were avoided by the timid, but there was nothing to the yarn. People seem to have a hunger for that sort of thing, and to crave it as a sauce for the prose of their daily events. So the story grows wonderfully when it once gets started.

"We had a little excitement in our cabin one night. I slept at one end of the alcove and Hiram at the other end, and I was awakened by his saying in a strained, unnatural voice, 'John, there's something in this room!'

"I started up and asked, 'What is it?'

"Don't get out of bed,' Hiram cautioned me. 'It's a sissing adder.'

"Then we heard it — 'Sis-s-s-s-qt!' — a dreadful sound in the darkness, and Hiram imagined he saw the snake with its swollen head crawling about the floor. Every few moments sounded that startling 'Sis-s-s-s-qt!' Hiram was trying to light a match, but in his nervousness the matches broke.

"I called to my dog, who slept somewhere about the house, 'Nip, Nip, come here!'

"But Nip did not respond. Instead, the sissing creature came in my direction, and it did n't stop till it was close to the bed. The next I knew it seemed to be attempting to crawl up the fly-netting which hung over the edges. I snatched at the fly-netting and cried out to frighten the varmint away. As it

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crossed the floor I had heard a tapping of heavy nails, which made me certain that it was something with legs and not a snake. So my mind conjured up a vision of an animal of the toad or turtle kind — warty, misshapen, and horrible. I felt that things had come to a crisis.

“Fortunately, just then Hiram succeeded in lighting a match, and when its tiny flame shone out across the room, there we saw Nip pawing at the side of my bed. Some sudden affliction of catarrh had made him wheeze and cough in a manner entirely strange and unrecognizable. I confess that I was all in a perspiration of excitement and fear, but now that the riddle was solved I laughed. Hiram, however, blew out his match and turned his face to the wall in disgust.

“Half a dozen years or more before I built Slab-sides, I lost my watch one winter and I did n’t find it till the next spring. Meanwhile a cart-wheel had run over it. I did n’t much regret what had happened, for it was a watch that had a habit of stopping once in a while three or four minutes and then going on again. As a result I often had to run to catch trains, and I suppose I hurt my health and shortened my life by the exertion that watch caused me.

“I had very little use for a watch, anyway. I was able to estimate the time pretty accurately from my inner consciousness without knowing how I did it, and I fared very well without one until Hiram came

to live at Slabsides with me. He wanted me to have a watch. So I bought one and got to depend on it; and really, after a while, I could n't tell the time with any certainty, even by looking at the sun.

"Hiram's bees did n't thrive in the Hudson valley, and after being here for three years he carried his hives back to the Catskills. But luck continues against him, though he is always hopeful and sees hundreds of dollars of profit in next year's honey. I send him a check once in a while or he would fare hardly.

"The whip-poor-wills begin to pipe about the middle of April, but are not in full song until the end of the month. They come very close to the house, and I hear some notes from them that would be strange to the ears of most people. Before they make any other sound they 'quit, quit!' just like a turkey. Then follows a preliminary cluck, and lastly they break into the familiar cry that gives them their name. The whip-poor-will makes its nest on the ground, and as it sits there its color and streaking are so like a piece of bark, and blend so well with the surroundings, that you never would see it if it did n't start up before you. The bird is up and off like some great moth or bat. It has a very silent flight and makes no sound whatever — no more than if it were a shadow. Like all nocturnal birds its web of feathers is very downy and much softer than that of the day birds. In the case of the

owls that want to steal on their prey, this is a great help, but the whip-poor-wills feed on insects and I don't understand why they should be so noiseless.

"I often hear the little whinny of the screech owls, and the cry of the hoot owls off in the woods. One day I had with me here at the cabin a friend who could imitate the calls of a great many birds and animals exactly. While we were out walking, we sat down under a tree, and he gave the hoot of an owl. Two crows appeared on the scene instantly. The owls eat the crows' eggs, and if the crows hear an owl hoot in the daytime, they all go and have a great powwow. They make such a noise that the owl wishes himself almost anywhere else. So when these two crows heard that call, they thought they had caught one of the robbers.

"'Come on, boys, here's fun!' they cried, and were after him at once. But when they saw us, they were sharp enough to see how the land lay, and they got out of there lively.

"My friend hooted again, and in a minute or two an owl came and lit on the tree above us and sat there looking down with his great round eyes. All he saw was those two featherless owls sitting at the foot of the tree laughing at him. But he would n't believe he was fooled, and he sat there grumbling at us till we went away.

"The noblest of all the birds that come within



view of my clearing is the eagle. Think of getting up in the morning and looking out of your window and seeing an eagle perched in plain sight! I've done that frequently. I see him up on a dead tree at the top of the mountain. He looks as big as a turkey, and he's near enough so I can see his white head and tail. He sits there a long time preening his plumage. I call his perch the 'eagle tree.' It is a big hemlock that has been struck by lightning.

"A great many trees about here have been lightning-struck. One that I was looking at recently was a large oak. The tree had been blown to pieces as if by an explosion of dynamite. Great slivers like rails were scattered all through the woods, some of them a hundred and fifty or two hundred feet from the tree.

"We had a very discouraging time with our young chicks one spring. A weasel got forty of them and we succeeded in raising only eight. Once I saw him running a well-grown chicken up and down the road. He seemed to think it very mean of the chicken to run. I went and got a gun and put an end to Mr. Weasel. He had a den near by, and I was sorry afterward that I shot him. I might have had some fun watching and studying the family.

"There was one year that I had a woodchuck just over the way at the foot of a cliff, but he did n't seem to like my company, and he dug out. I'd see him nibbling the leaves, and sometimes he'd nib-

ble my celery. We threatened to dispatch him for that, and maybe 't was our threats frightened him away.

"Coons tear down my sweet corn, and the rabbits eat off my raspberry bushes, and chipmunks carry away the corn I put out for the chickens.

"Of course things are comparatively quiet in winter; but there are the chickadees, the woodpeckers, blue jays, and crows loitering about, and sometimes the hounds drive a fox across the clearing right in front of the house.

"Living in the woods is a real satisfaction to me. When I reach Slabsides there is always a sense of relief, as if I'd got away from something that harassed me. The place attracts me, and I feel very much at home, with the great rock that I can see from my window reaching round my house like a protecting arm.

"There's nothing like having a snug nook or corner where one can live in retirement. I don't hear the roar of the great political, commercial, and business world at all, and that is a real boon.

"Some have said to me, 'Why do you live back here when you have a nice place down there by the Hudson?'

"They can't understand why a man should wish to return to the simpler, ruder things of life. As for me, if I keep on growing in grace, I expect to come to the point when I shall feel that a tent, or a hut

with one room, is all I want. Perhaps that is going too far, but it is better than the other extreme, where a man can find nothing good enough for him and must have a house of a hundred rooms with fifty guest-chambers.

"My excursions to nature have made my sense of smell so keen that I get great pleasure from the wild open-air perfumes. On the other hand, I abhor the odor of tobacco and am eager to escape from close rooms and the stench of cities.

"How much more narcotic and sedative the country is than the city! The constant slamming and grinding in the city are distressing. Perhaps my hearing may be unusually sensitive. If you catch me on the little steamer that plies up and down the Hudson and stops at the West Park wharf, and the whistle blows unawares, I clap my hands to my ears quick as lightning.

"I have no question but that the sounds we hear affect our health. For instance, people who live along railroads must suffer a constant wear and tear to their nervous systems. What a pandemonium let loose the railroad is!

"I wish some one would start a crusade against noise. We shall have it in time. The Peter the Hermit who's to call us out will appear presently, and then the ear will be respected as well as the nose. I lived at Riverby between two railroads. There was the West Shore over the hill behind me, and the New

York Central at the water's edge just across the Hudson. The screeching of the engines on clear days was enough to drive you crazy.

"One train over the river always stopped and sent a brakeman on ahead to turn a switch. Then the engine blew three toots that were calculated to startle the invalids for two miles around. It was a great bungling sheaf of sound, full of spears and prickles. What was the use of all that sound? They 'd better have tied their brakeman with a string — had a rope around his neck and pulled him in — anything but to blow that whistle. Why should our ears be assaulted with hideous noises any more than our noses with bad smells?

"There's one night steamer on the river that has a whistle with a wild, musical strain like the voice of a wild goose. When I hear it I wish it would keep on blowing for an hour. Why can't all our whistles be musical and sweet? A pure sound will go farther than an impure one, any time.

"If one of the leading railroad magnates would only inaugurate the reform, the rest of the world would fall into line. It would make his road popular. All the railroads try to keep the smoke out of the cars, but they continue to make a racket sufficient to bring the heavens down on you. The time is approaching when we shall have a change, when car porters won't be allowed to slam the doors with noise enough to wake the dead, and when we won't



stand the infernal din of our cobbled streets. But that will be when we get more civilized.

“The Americans are a very patient and long-suffering people. We can get points from the English in this respect. When I was in London I went to a reading that was announced to begin at eight o’clock. The hour came and not the reader. At once the audience got uneasy, and within two minutes there were men on their feet wanting to know why the thing did n’t start; and it began without further delay. An audience in this country would have sat half the evening waiting before it would have made a disturbance. The American hates to make a row. So things are at loose ends.

“For instance, there’s our telegraph monopoly that needs attention. The telegraph people have everything all their own way and take their own time about delivering messages. I usually find, when I send a message, that if I’d gone afoot and carried it in my hand it would have got to its destination quicker.

“Clatter and confusion are things I feel a good deal. My nerves are all on the surface and they are easily ruffled and irritated. On the other hand, they are easily relieved and quieted, and I only need to go to Nature to have my senses put in tune.

“The most soothing thing that I know of is the sea, and next to that is the face of a scarred cliff. I know how impressed I have been with the stony tops of the Adirondack Mountains. The composure

of their rocks is like the face of God Almighty. What venerableness, what power, what repose! It is grandeur unspeakable.

“There’s nothing in any city can touch me that way. For me real living is to be among the rocks, the hills, and the forests. It is that instinct made me build Slabsides. Here I stay and watch my days go by. Some of them are bright, some of them are dun-colored, and some are black. But on the whole I have a pretty good time.”

## XIII

*May, 1905*

### COMMENTS ON RELIGION

THE train left me at West Park about eight in the evening. Burroughs was expecting me, and had a messenger on hand to give me a lantern and tell me to come up to Slabsides. The night was dark and there were occasional misty showers. I went on up the muddy, slippery road and into the wet, dripping woods. I chose to go by the short-cut. In spots trees had been felled by choppers, and the litter of branches and trunks made traveling uncertain. Presently I came to steep rocks where masses of dead leaves filled the spaces between the loose stones and obliterated the path completely — or at any rate made it indistinguishable by lantern light. I stumbled along, pushing my way through the brushy lower limbs of the trees, and after much experimenting and advancing and retreating, while I became more and more heated and disconcerted, I finally struck into what I recognized as the Slabsides road. Then it did not take me long to reach the fertile valley basin where Burroughs had his rustic home, and I saw before me a cheering light shining from the cabin window.

When I went to bed, which was soon, for nine o'clock was Burroughs's retiring hour, he sent me

to the upstairs chamber with a warning that I was not to disturb a nest that a robin had built on my window-sill.

The next morning he went up to have a look at the nest, and was a good deal agitated to find no eggs in it. Something had robbed it. He was quick to show solicitude over the dangers and mishaps of all the gentler wild creatures.

While he was getting breakfast, a migrating Canadian sparrow flew with a sharp tap against a window-pane, and he went and looked out and gave the bird a greeting.

On our way down through the woods that morning, he observed on a drooping hemlock bough a bird's nest that was getting loose, and he carefully propped up the bough to make the nest safe. At the village he took me under the church horse-shed to see how a robin had been confused in its nest-building by the likeness of the spaces where the rafters met the beam at the eaves. The bird had started nests all along the beam.

Burroughs picked two long dandelion stems that grew near the horse-shed, and as he put the ends of them in his mouth to chew on them, he remarked, "They're a good tonic — bitter, you know."

One of his backwoods neighbors was a man who had reached the age of eighty-eight. We met him in the village, and Burroughs introduced him to me as a person who believed that the world was flat.



Not only did the old gentlemen believe in the flatness, but he was confident he could prove it. When Burroughs remarked that he thought the world was round, the woodland philosopher said, "Well, Bucky, that's where you're mistaken."

We went to Riverby and found Mrs. Burroughs house-cleaning. She was giving every room thorough-going treatment whether it had been used or not. We had no inclination to linger, and soon turned our footsteps toward Slabsides. That noon we feasted on potatoes and onions roasted in the ashes, broiled steak, and asparagus, and we had a dessert of cold pudding and a jar of rhubarb brought from the Riverby pantry.

During this visit Burroughs was notified that he had been elected to the American Academy. "But I'm not a scholar and professional literary man," he commented. "I'm not entitled to the membership. I've looked over the list of Academicians, and some of 'em I've never heard of before. I think Saint-Gaudens, the sculptor, is about the only one worthy of the honor. He's done some wonderful work."

"I wish you would tell me something of your boyhood religious environment," I suggested, "and of what your impressions on the subject of religion are now."

His people were "Primitive Baptists," to use a term often found in the literature of the sect, and

they faithfully attended services at the "Old Yellow Church." This building still stands, a great barn of a structure, on a bare hillock by the roadside two miles down the valley from Roxbury village. Adjoining it are some horse-sheds and a cemetery. Among the graves can be found those of Burroughs's parents, and those of Jay Gould's parents.

In response to my questions Burroughs said:

"On Sunday, when we children in the family at the old farm were growing up, our father did only such work as was necessary, and shaved, and if there was a service in the Old School Baptist Church he went to it. He would no more be seen in the Methodist Church than he would be seen in a saloon.

"Our folks never urged us children to go to church and never gave us any religious books to read. The Old School Baptists frowned on all sorts of religious education. They did n't believe in Sunday schools. They thought religion was too sacred to be handled in the way that Sunday schools handle it, or to be taught in books. If a man was meant to be saved, they believed he would be saved; and if he was meant to be damned, he would be damned, whether or no. Therefore they must n't use any influence to warp the will of the Lord. They expected the time would come when we children would be drawn to the church — that the Spirit would move us.

"It was their idea that a minister should n't write his sermons, but get up in the pulpit and say what



*At the Borders of the Slabsides Swamp*



*Warm Weather*



the Lord put in his mouth. They disbelieved in this whole religious machinery business. Writing a sermon, or even making notes for it, was sacrilege — an insult, an outrage. How could a minister know what God would have him say until he opened his mouth to speak? If he prepared the words beforehand, they were his own, not God's. There was a grain of truth in this reasoning, for it placed a premium on spontaneity above all deliberation.

“Yes, the Hardshell preachers trusted to the Lord to put the words in their mouths when they got up to speak. I thought that was placing a great responsibility on God for some of the sermons I heard preached. They were a curious jumble — all mixed up, without head or tail, and with no logical coherence or significance at all. They were as far off from our daily lives as the earth is from the moon. The preachers were entirely unlettered, but they'd study the Bible and charge their minds with Biblical phrases. They'd take a text for a sermon at random, or perhaps say, ‘This text came into my mind on the way to church.’

“They preached all around the horizon, rambling on and on and hitting whatever they could, but what they said had a Biblical sound that comforted the old people in their conflict with the world.

“The preachers did n't receive a salary and would n't take pay except indirectly. If you sent them some grain or hay or other supplies, that was

all right. They earned their living about the same as did their hearers, and it was n't their custom to spend much time in their studies.

"Usually they were men of vigor and individuality, and they imparted to their sermons a flavor of their own. Occasionally they had a real streak of native eloquence. The present-day preachers of the sect have n't the same originality and ruggedness. They are like tea thrice steeped so the strength is all gone out of it.

"Elder Jim Mead used to preach barefooted sometimes. I suppose he would say, 'The apostles did n't wear shoes, and why should I?'

"He was poor and uncouth, but with a Spartan control of his emotions. One day his son and another man went hunting — I remember mother told me it was the twenty-third of January — and they lost their way in a snowstorm. They were found dead afterward. They'd walked round and round in a circle after they were nearly home. The elder was preaching in the schoolhouse when he was informed that his son's body had been found, but he finished his sermon.

"Another preacher was Elder Hewitt, big of stature and a good farmer. In fact, he was so successful in a business way that I guess he must have been worth fifty thousand dollars when he died.

"He was narrow and intolerant, and was much addicted to pitching into the Arminians as he called the Methodists. Yes, Sunday after Sunday and

year after year he'd be scoring the Arminians. It was his view that they upheld a doctrine of wholesale salvation, which he denounced as heretical. He was emotional, and sometimes would weep in the pulpit. His voice was strident, and at the prayer-meetings in the schoolhouse he'd pray just as loud as he could yell, when he'd got up all the steam he had in him. It would fairly rattle the shingles on the roof. Well, the shouters and howlers are no more. They did good work and passed.

"We took a religious paper, the organ of the sect. 'Signs of the Times' was its name. I hardly ever looked into it. Doing so was too serious a matter. The paper was mainly taken up with experiences of sisters and brothers from Maine to Oregon — the tales of flounderings through quagmires of doubt to the firm ground of faith. Father would read them with tears in his eyes.

"The experiences were all the same thing, very lugubrious and painful. They had one general hue. First there was the smiting of the conscience — a dreadful conviction of sin and unworthiness — and the sinner's feeling that he was going to hell sure sank deeper and deeper into his soul. Then he would search the Scriptures and find a text that would help him, and the next thing he would find another text that would dash all his hopes. Then 'suddenly these words would flash into his mind,' and after that all was cleared up.

"Oh, those poor old souls! But, whatever the significance of their feeling, it was genuine. They meant what they said about it. They were in great tribulation and darkness — often in periods that extended over weeks and months — before they were brought out in the light and were sure they were saved. Strange to say, their descendants don't have such experiences. They may join the church, but it's in a lukewarm fashion — never in the red-hot way of the old fellows. Somehow they are not worthy of the deep feeling that the elders had. They don't have it. They are a more superficial set. I think they are distinctly an inferior race.

"Now just a handful attend the Old School Baptist meetings. To accept literally the creed of the sect with its emphasis on predestination is a heroic act, and the sons of the old members are not men enough to follow their father's example. They are too tenderfooted. Religion does n't mean as much to most people as it did two or three generations ago. The multiplication of reading is one thing that tends to make people more artificial.

"I often look back and envy my father the satisfaction he got in his church. He got companionship. He was one of a fold. He did n't feel the great cosmic chill as I feel it. I mean the feeling that comes to one when he sees the tremendous processes of nature go on entirely independent of him, and knows that he is not shut in by any protecting walls, that he has to



take his chances and warm himself as best he can. Such feelings the old people did n't have — at least, not after they joined their church. I suppose I get from literature something like what father got from his church. The church saved him, and this other will save me.

“Probably the fear of hell is about evaporated in these days. I never had a really vivid realization of anything of the sort myself; and I never had the least belief in the devil. As soon as I got old enough to think about the matter, I could n't imagine it possible that the Supreme Being was in partnership with such a creature. For if the devil existed, he was created by God, who was therefore in partnership with him. That God could n't control him absolutely and abolish him if he existed seemed an idea which was childish — puerile. Surely, a supreme being could n't be thwarted in his ends and aims.

“I never speculated about the Trinity. I always looked on that as a puzzle men made for themselves, and then worked out the solution as best they could.

“I did n't believe in evil the way people commonly believe in it. I did n't think there was a dualism in nature — two things struggling against each other. Evil is one phase of good. How could there be any progress if there was n't something to overcome? You can't paint a picture all white. You have to

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have shades. But the truth about evil is the forbidden fruit. We are not to know it lest our efforts to overcome evil be relaxed.

"I came near joining the Methodist Church once. That was at Tongore, where I was teaching school. I had got into the habit of going to the Sunday services, largely perhaps because of the charm of certain maidens who were sure to be present. I know I did n't go for any pleasure I got out of the dominie's long-winded sermons. Those made me restive.

"Presently there was a revival, and I attended all the meetings. One night I went forward to the anxious seat. So much had been said about what was to be gained by doing this that I expected it would result in some miraculous change in me. I simply believed what the preacher had been asserting. I thought if I went to the anxious seat and knelt in a serious state of mind, I'd get converted, made over, or something, without any further trouble.

"Pretty soon some of the leaders in the revival asked me how I felt.

"Well, I did n't see that I was any different from the commonplace person I always had been, and I told them I felt about the same as I did before.

"They did n't like that. If I'd been less honest, or if I'd been weak-kneed, I suppose I'd have been a convert. As it was I decided to work out my salvation some other way. The next night the preacher

prayed for the teacher who was 'taking his whole flock down to hell with him.'

"That was putting it on a little too strong. It riled me, and I thought we'd go to hell if that was where we were bound for.

"I don't believe in these emotional conversions under strong excitement. It's just exactly as a man does a thing when he's drunk, and the converted person's psychic condition is worse than it was before. The effect of conversion on the younger people in the revivals I remember was comparatively mild. But some of the older people, converted under that furnace heat, were convinced there had been a fundamental change. They became thorough-going religious people both inwardly and formally. Yet all along they had been sound at heart. I never knew an essentially bad man to be made over by conversion. I never knew a man who was mean and sneaking and lying or sensual previous to conversion who was n't so afterward. The change is merely outward, not radical. People in their excitement think something strange happens to them, but no doubt it's entirely psychological.

"I have never accepted the creed of any church myself. My reverence is for righteousness, not dogma. I have 'given my heart to Nature instead of to God,' as the old people would say, but that has never cast a shadow over my mind or conscience. I believe God is Nature. I also believe there is some

sort of omnipotent intelligence underlying the manifestations of power and the orderliness that we see in the universe.

“Personal immortality, for which so many have a keen desire, has never seemed to me probable, though I can’t say that it is impossible.

“In spite of my beliefs, or the lack of them, the dominies rather take to me. Yes, I’ve always got along pretty well with them, but theologically I regard most of them as rather stupid, infantile, or superstitious. Their sermons are commonplace, and abound in logic that is artificial and mistaken, or shallow. I can’t listen to them with any comfort.

“I help support the church near my home, but I rarely go to it. I feel a little conscience-smitten at times over this delinquency, because I think church-going is better than staying away for most persons, and my example is not a good one. If I lived in a city I think I could pick out a preacher I’d enjoy hearing. There’s Dr. Crothers, of Cambridge, for instance, a man of great ability and originality. I can listen to him with genuine satisfaction.

“I don’t feel as if there is anything we can be very dogmatic about. If you observe closely, you find you know so little, and you find such contradictions. Storms in the southern hemisphere whirl in the direction taken by the hands of a watch. In the northern hemisphere they whirl in the opposite direction. Well, I notice the little whirlwinds we have, and they



whirl just as the storms do. Then I notice the bean and the bittersweet and numbers of other vines, and find that they climb in a spiral which also corresponds to the storm motion; and I think I've discovered a general law. But presently I find that the hop goes the other way, and so does the wild buckwheat; and you can't make them do any different.

"A person is not religious just because he has a definite scheme of theology. He may have that and be entirely lacking in æsthetic and moral sensitiveness. The lover of nature and of the good and beautiful is the truly religious man, and you find such in every church and outside of any church. I have no patience with those people who know all about God and his plans — who, as Matthew Arnold says, 'speak of God as if he lived around the corner, where they interviewed him daily.'

"It does n't make you religious simply to have a definite notion about heaven and hell. I think Renan's was a truly religious nature. Smite him on one cheek and he would turn to you the other. Take away his coat and he would give you his waistcoat. He would n't return evil for evil. That's the true test of a Christian. If you can't return good for evil, it's a mockery to call yourself a Christian. To give a soft answer when we have received a wrathful one is the most difficult thing in the world.

"The preacher says: 'Trust in Christ. Follow him. Come to the baptismal fountain.' It's the

Christ within us that we should trust. It's the voice of conscience that we should follow. It's the love of truth and the doing to others as we would be done by that we should aspire to. That is Christ. Religion is a life — not something apart from the person who has it. Christ exemplified that. It was Paul and not Christ who led the way in formulating a Christian creed and theology.

"I've taken a good deal of curious interest in Christian Science. It's amazing how blamed optimistic and cheerful the Christian Scientists are made by their religion. The effect is good on their health, and they certainly are happier for their belief. I know one of them — a woman, and the wife of a physician — and she's just like a ray of sunshine. Of course her religion does n't go down very well with her husband. It's so childish — so silly. I'm ashamed of it when its adherents attempt to explain it. I pity their intellects. As soon as they begin to argue about it, they're lost. Mrs. Eddy is not fish, flesh, nor fowl, and it's strange that she should be so widely accepted as an inspired religious leader. Anybody that thinks at all can't help but see the folly of Christian Science. Really, though, the other religions are not free from folly either. They're all preposterous.

"It's not the truth of your religion that saves, but the truth of your belief in it. I don't care if it is that the moon is made of green cheese. The one

thing needful on your part is sincerity — otherwise there's no anchorage.

“Christian Scientists find pleasure in giving rein to their emotions, and there are certain diseases, which, if they imagine they have n't got, are cured. They only need to believe in their heart of hearts that they have n't the disease in order to get well. The last time I saw that cheerful doctor's wife she had a cough. She spoke of it, and said, ‘I've been so busy I have n't had time to get at it.’ She was confident she could cure it by believing it away, but I don't know whether it is that sort or not.

“She has a sister, a very capable and well-educated woman to whom Christian Science is nonsense, but who is inclined to be peppery and impatient. I've said to this peppery one: ‘I wish you had some of your sister's temperament. If you could be a sincere Christian Scientist it would improve you.’

“It's curious what beliefs — even disgusting beliefs — are associated with beautiful lives. I've been reading Miss Merriam's ‘My Summer in a Mormon Village.’ All the glimpses you get of the Mormon women in this book appeal to you. The men seem more selfish — like hogs. I said all through the book, as I read, ‘How sweet and good and human this book is!’

“One of the characters the author calls ‘a mother in Israel,’ and rightly too. This mother in Israel really believed in the revelations of Joseph Smith,

and a most religious woman she was — life counts for so much more than the creed!

“Look back on the history of humanity and think how we’ve blundered along, sometimes knee-deep in blood! The babe that might be the savior of his race has the smallpox or whooping-cough, and dies just as quickly as the most worthless. In nature the struggle for place and life is unending. A maple tree will drop a hundred thousand seeds to one that will ever grow into a tree. Accident and destruction and death are nothing to Nature. She has infinite time to perfect her ends. What Nature’s ends are, or God’s ends, I often have but a faint idea. Most of our preachers seem much too sure and much too ready with their explanations of these things. Some eminent Englishman once said he wished he was as sure of anything as Lord Macaulay was of everything. I feel the same way about the preachers.

“But, however much I differ with them, I think we can agree that it is always fitting to preach the gospel of beauty in the commonplace. Look about your own vicinity and find heaven. The grand and beautiful are there if you have eyes for them. We must n’t expect the extraordinary — a miracle. We should look at what lies around us at our feet. We gaze at the stars — we forget that we are on a star.”



## XIV

*May, 1907*

### THE CHARM OF NATURE

ON this visit, when Burroughs and I walked from the station up to Slabsides, we did n't go by the steep short-cut, but around by the gentler ascent of the road, and he stopped several times to rest. "I've had a hard winter," he explained. "I sprained my hip, broke a bone in my hand, and have had grip and pneumonia. It has left me very weak."

A carefully mended tear in his trousers seemed to attest that Mrs. Burroughs looked well after his apparel.

When we were at our ease in the woodland cabin and personal items of news had been exchanged, we talked of what Nature meant to him and he said:

"I'm interested in all the wild creatures, and I'm interested in flowers, though I've written comparatively little about them. Yet I like the flowers as much as anybody. There is the first hepatica — one can stand and look at it as at the face of a dear friend. It has come up out of the dead ground, and has opened its beautiful tender blue eye. How can I help lingering around? Nor do I ever see the first daisy in summer without emotion.

"But nothing appeals to me quite so much out of

doors as the birds. There's something more human about them than about the flowers. They're winged persons. None of the other creatures has the same mystery that these winged things have. But I care for them only as a part of the environment that is normal to them. I don't care for them in a museum. It is the live bird I want.

"I suppose, strictly speaking, I am not a naturalist. In fact, I prefer to call myself a nature-lover. I've never dissected an animal in my life, except on my plate with a knife and fork, but in the young women's colleges they make a feature of learning about nature by dissecting cats. That sort of study seems to me very poor stuff.

"I want to get at nature first-hand. Birds in the house don't attract me. The caged bird lacks the proper surroundings, but the bird in its native haunts always sets my emotions vibrating. How interesting the nesting of birds is! I can sit and watch their building operations for hours, they are so absorbed in the task and they have such curious ways. Some of these ways are quite human. For instance, the female does all the work, just as the women do among savages. The drudgery falls to her, while the male is a gentleman, a lord. He comes to look on and encourage her; but she seems to be irritated by his presence, and may even scold and drive him away.

"The birds are enjoyable in all their characteristics — in their battles, their songs, their flight,



*Talking with "Amasy" at the Study Door*



*The Grandchildren in the Playhouse*



their color. As for color, though, they are generally rather sober. The one bit of genuinely brilliant color in the bird world of our climate is the tanager. You see a tanager sitting on a little hemlock, and the color against such a background holds and delights the eye wonderfully.

“The flight of the birds always attracts me. How peculiarly expressive a lark’s flight is, seen against the sky! The flapping and sailing of the hawks are unlike the movements of any other birds. I could recognize many of the birds by their flight, if I saw nothing else.

“Last May I went up to my old home in the Catskills, and I went at that particular season because I wanted to hear the bobolinks in the meadows where I knew them as a boy. There’s no place equal to the Catskills for bobolinks. They have a more pleasing song there than in other parts of the country. The song has a tinkling in it as we hear it along the Hudson. It has n’t the resonance and copiousness of the songs on the high meadows of those hill farms. I don’t know why — perhaps because the air is different.

“All English birds have a quality of harshness in their songs, and, at the same time, of strength. The English skylark has n’t the melody of our bobolink, nor his rollicking, devil-may-care sort of manner. Yet the song of the skylark is an expression of buoyancy, of hardy, virile country strength — the utterance of

a rapt poet. The bobolink is n't as serious. He acts a bit tipsy.

"There was a curious piece in the New York 'Evening Post' the other day about bobolinks. The writer said that to hear them at their best you wanted to sit on the haycocks in the fields on a summer evening. But by haying-time the bobolink has lost his earlier song of rivalry and happiness. He sings only in snatches, and he scolds. The article went on to tell how the old birds sang, and then added, 'and the young birds join in the chorus.' Well, that's rather ridiculous, for the young birds have a *pip*, and no song at all.

"We have a true skylark on the Catskill hills. His manner is exactly the same as that of the English skylark. He climbs up and up in a hovering ecstasy of flight till he soars three or four hundred feet in the air. But he has the rudest and most rudimentary song. He seems like a bird whose voice is almost shut off by a bad cold. Perhaps he's just begun to sing. No doubt he will improve, for the law of evolution operates among birds the same as it does in everything else. Bird-songs change. So does our speech. Supposing we had no written language; two hundred years from now a person who knew only our present language would n't be able to understand us.

"I've heard a robin with the song of a brown thrasher. The imitation was so perfect I could n't believe it was a robin till I saw the bird. I know a

certain valley in the Catskills where the bobolinks have a song all their own. The bobolinks in that valley have added to their song a peculiar bell-like note. It seems to be the fad there.

“A bobolink does n’t sing close by his nest, but always within earshot of it. In his song he is merely expressing the joy of home-making, his love for mate and little ones, his delight in nature. Ah! the bobolink is a wonderful songster.

“What interesting birds the crows are! They have roosts in the woods for at least a part of the year — that is, they come together in great flocks and spend the night in some particular place. I have heard of other birds having their tribal roosts, but they have n’t come under my observation.

“The birds mostly roost where their nests are. The orioles roost way out on the ends of pendant branches. I’ve seen them there. Ground birds will roost on the ground. I sometimes start them up when I’m walking at night.

“A number of species of birds gather in flocks when they are preparing to migrate. I’ve seen ten thousand swallows moving southward in one day on the Jersey coast. They were scattered all through the air in a great loose flock. But there are only a few kinds of birds that make the journey in that way, either going or coming. They travel singly or in family groups. They migrate at night, and we don’t see much of them on the passage. I’ve

heard the warblers calling at night as they pass overhead.

“The birds don’t start from Canada and make a business of getting to Florida as fast as they can. They loiter along with the season. There are kinglets and other birds on the top of the highest Catskills in early autumn that you won’t see down at Riverby for another month. They wait for the weather to sharpen. In their spring and autumn migrations they may hasten or retard their journey if the weather is unseasonable. But though they may loiter or stop, I doubt if they would turn back on their course, except possibly in case of a snowstorm on their way north. Then they might return far enough to get to bare ground. They would n’t be driven just by rain or cold.

“The birds have to rest, and they have to feed. They can’t see to feed at night, and if they flew by day they’d be apt to be disturbed. The water-birds in their migrating may often go hundreds of miles at a stretch. You usually see them in the early morning or in the evening. If you see a flight at midday, it is because they have been scared away from the water where they had stopped to feed. Sometimes I will hear the *honk, honk*, of the wild geese passing high in the air at midnight. That’s the clarion call of the gander. It is a delightful sound which I love to hear, there is something so very wild about it.

“I like to see ducks, even tame ones. I have a



flock of my own that I enjoy watching. They feel the wild blood in their bodies still, as is evident by the way they flap their wings. Sometimes they flap so hard they lift themselves off the ground.

“What persistent, prolific creatures the English sparrows are! You can destroy their nests, you can poison them and wage war on them in any way you please, and yet they continue to thrive. They were brought here originally to fatten on the insects which preyed on our city shade-trees, but their taste was for food of another sort, and they’ve spread till no part of our domain is free from them.

“I remember that I first saw them about 1866 in Jersey City. They were scratching around in the streets, and I said to myself, ‘What in thunder are those birds?’ Soon they were in Washington, where I was then living, and one day I noticed a boy shooting them with a sling. I wanted to call the police. ‘They’ll be exterminated,’ I thought, ‘and that’ll be too bad.’

“But I did n’t know them. A few years ago a friend of mine shot sixty sparrows one after the other from a single nest, and the survivor of the pair always found a new mate. As the shooting continued, the birds got cautious. They would skedaddle as soon as they saw the gunner, and they finally raised the brood in the nest.

“The sparrows don’t seem as threatening a nuisance as they did at first. They are essentially a

town bird. The country does n't furnish sufficient food in winter and is too cold. They are seed-eaters, and the droppings of grain-fed town horses have been their chief dependence. With the introduction of electric cars and automobiles this source of food has been diminished and has tended to cut off the sparrows. Besides, the hawks have come to understand them and now often hover around the cities to pick them up.

"I'm a little apprehensive about the starlings that have been introduced in America from abroad in recent years. They've got to live, and they are hustlers. I don't know of their doing any harm, but that sharp beak of theirs makes me suspicious that they damage the fruit. I saw a flock last night — a dozen or so. It made a new impression against the sky — wings, beak, or something. It's ticklish business introducing new forms like that into the country. They don't run riot in their native land. There they've found their place, and some check prevents an abnormal increase.

"A natural check develops for every pest we have. At one time our elm-tree foliage was pretty badly riddled by beetles that arrived on our shores from their native Europe. We were ready to say, 'Good-bye, elms,' but presently some enemy or distemper appeared, and the beetles are no longer a menace.

"Up in Delaware County, several years ago, the forest-worm played havoc with the maple trees.

When a maple tree has been denuded three successive years, it gives up and dies. Well, the worms ate off the leaves two years, but the third year the ichneumon-flies got busy and put an egg in each forest-worm chrysalis — millions of them. When an egg hatched, the grub ate up its host. I looked around in the woods and found out what had happened, and I told the farmers they would n't have any more forest-worms. Yes, Nature keeps a certain equilibrium.

“The birds appeal to me most in their relation to the seasons and to my own past. People change, and places change, but the birds are seemingly the identical ones I have always known, endowed with eternal youth. When one of these friends of my boyhood reappears in the spring, I say, ‘Hello, old fellow! So you’re not dead yet!’ and I feel myself transported instantly back to my father’s farm in the Catskills.

“The notes of the first returning robin or song sparrow that I hear are like opening a door right into spring, and nothing else opens the door of the season so effectively. The most welcome sound that comes to my ears during the whole year is the call of the robin at sunset — its ‘Ha-ha!’ which I think of as its laughter. How that kindles and wakens one up! With me it brings to mind associations connected with the sugar-grove where I heard the same call as a boy.

“Nearly everything in nature refers one back, stirs some emotion connected with the past; and that past always has a halo, a glory which did n’t appear at the time. For the moment you are young again, and the experience is very delightful, even though it is pathetic. One of the sounds I heard in my youth was the bleating of the sheep in the twilight on the hills, and I like to hear it now. Oh, it is inexpressibly sweet and rural! The earliest bumble-bee also awakens a youthful memory, when I hear the mellow bass of its wings on the first warm days of April. It is the female going zigzag here and there, searching for a place to make her nest. In the same way it is a joy to see our first butterfly, ‘the mourning cloak,’ dancing through the open.

“All the year similar sights and sounds accent the changes. There is the note of the first harvest-fly — the cicada. That begins a new chapter. It means the ripening season, and that the long, tranquil, languid days of midsummer have gone.

“I’m specially interested at that season in the big winged grasshoppers. You know the shuffling sound they make, and how they hover in the air like a hawk. I pause to look at them now just as I used to when I was a boy. In those days I would sometimes catch one by giving it a knock with my hat and then grabbing it. There was quite a triumph in effecting a capture, because the grasshopper had wings and was so much like a bird. Now and then



I would secure a lot of them by going in the early morning to a place I knew where they roosted on a slaty rock. This rock was warmed by the sun during the day, and they sought it for its heat, which was long retained. But by morning the heat was gone, and then they were a little stiff with the cold and easily captured.

“Another token of the ripening season is the insects one hears in the air on an August day — a soft melodious hum from an invisible source. It is honey bees and flies and similar creatures going to and fro. They have bred numerously, and the sound of their wings forms a background above you as extensive as the sky itself. You can hear it anywhere in the fields or on a hill, and it is very sweet to me; for I heard it in my youth, and it takes me back to what, in my own feeling, seems a sort of lost paradise.

“I like to watch any work I used to do on the old farm. There was the planting of corn the last of May. We planted only on days that were warm and nice; and what a pleasure it was as I look back! — though I suppose I was all the time longing to be off rambling in the woods or fishing by the streams. Haying was a great event in my youth. When the time arrived it meant the beginning of a strenuous season. How we had to fight for a month! The work was hard, but how fragrant the grass and the big loads of hay! Then there were the summer showers that used to come and give us a rest.

"I am very much attracted by springs. I never can go by one without stopping and drinking; and it is a kind of religion with me to clean out any spring that is befouled. You see, a spring is a vital place. Something begins there, and all forms of life cluster round and love it. I rejoice when I find a spring in the woods. If I go back to my old home, I visit the springs I used to know — and there were a great many on our farm — all cold and sweet. I have associations with every one of them, and I clean them out, sit by them, and read a book, and drink and drink and drink again.

"Trout brooks appeal to me through my liking for fishing and the pleasure I used to take swimming in their pools. I spent many boyhood hours wandering along their banks.

"One thing which stirs my emotion, but which has no associations with my boyhood, is the ocean. The first time I saw it was at Coney Island with Walt Whitman. It possesses for me a great fascination — even more than the mountains have, because I have those with me so much of the time. I find it a tonic, and it stirs my imagination — the immensity of it, always active and unchanging; that primordial water forever pounding on the sand.

"There is always a profound appeal to me in the country home, or a winding rural roadway. The domestic look around an old farm is a satisfaction. That is why England gives me more pleasure than

any other country. It is a land of homes which date back to a remote past and are very suggestive of household delights and joys. New England also has its old homesteads, which nestle in their surroundings, mellow, picturesque, and comfortable. They are charming because man has left his mark on nature without scarring it or making it artificial — and the human in nature, when harmonious with it, is good to witness.

“One thing that repels me in our West is the newness and rawness of the dwellings and environment, but time may furnish a remedy. The passing years give to the trees and grass some quality that can’t be had immediately. The very look of the earth is different by reason of man’s long contact with it.

“I learned a great many things about nature in my boyhood which I didn’t know I learned — gathered a great many valuable facts and impressions. I never studied the birds. I simply loved them. Nature opened her heart to me because I opened my heart to her. I don’t have much sympathy with those who go out to the fields deliberately to study nature. They make a dead set at it for a little while, and then return to their money-making, or to society and the fashions. Yet I suppose they absorb some good, and I’m glad to have them take their way of obtaining it rather than miss it altogether. There is virtue just in getting the

sun tan on their faces, and the earth tan on their shoes.

"A town girl I once met, who was attending a young women's school, said she did n't care a straw for nature — in fact, rather hated it. She was a very attractive girl, the brightest student in the school and she wanted my advice about this lack of hers. I told her she had better stick to the things she did love, and that a liking for nature might come later. 'Go out into the country,' I said, 'and walk, row, and ride. Don't think about nature, but go to have a good time. Go with your sweetheart, if need be, and let nature's influence steal in on you. Don't try to daub on a love of nature, but weave nature in with your life, and the liking can't help growing.'

"Another thing I would say to those who go forth to observe the out-of-door world is to seek truth and not attempt to fancy that the animals have the thought-capacity of human beings. I have always looked for any gleam of intelligence I could find in the wild life, and made as much of it as I could. But the new school of nature-writers gave me such a shock with their romancing that I went the other way pretty fast, though I don't think I have gone too far. I said: 'Those fellows ought to be overhauled. I guess I'll have to roast them a little.'

"It sort of woke me up. I should n't have minded if they had told what they told as stories. We have had our fairy-tale animals and our Æsop's Fables for



centuries, but the present-day creators of fictitious animals all hang themselves in a preface. Their characters are human beings in animal clothing, and reason and act just as we would; yet the authors say in their preface, 'These things are true.' I could n't stand that, and thought it was time an example was made of some of them. It was n't right that people should believe such yarns.

"The rumpus began in 1903. People had often asked me if I'd read a certain nature-writer, concerning whose work I'd seen favorable comments in the papers. 'I must get hold of his books,' I said.

"The next thing I knew, a teacher who'd been telling me how good they were sent me one of them. 'Now I'll have a treat,' I remarked, and sat down to devour it.

"But I had n't read five minutes when I became indignant and threw the book down. 'The man is a liar!' I said.

"I got his other books, but they were all the same. The more I read the hotter I got. He was deceiving the public, and I felt that I ought to show him up. So I wrote an article, and because the man was a minister I said some pretty sharp things about the clergy, but I cut those out later. The article was published in the 'Atlantic' and made a great uproar. It's hard for me to be unkind to any man or beast, but the case was such a flagrant one of humbugging the public that I had to speak out. I've never re-

pented writing the article, but it was n't wise for me to let my anger show in print.

"President Roosevelt jumped into the fray and backed me up; and he spoke with authority, for he was not only an enthusiastic hunter, but one of the most accurate observers I've ever known.

"The result of it all was that the Nature-Fakers drew in their horns. I hope they will keep them drawn in. Even the man who particularly aroused my wrath grew more modest, and he has since done some work that I consider excellent.

"I grant that it is difficult to write and not overdo, if you attempt a story. Unless you overdo you feel that you will fail to get to the mark. It is seductive. I might not keep within bounds myself if I were to write stories. But reality is to me so much better than fiction, that I want imagination to illumine facts, not to make them over. My love of the real was strong at the beginning, I guess, and it has grown because of what I have fed on. In my books I have aimed to portray things just as I have felt them, and if the books have any special merit, it is that they make the reader participate in my own feelings."

Probably the effect of Burroughs on the nature-writers who mixed fact and fiction indistinguishably in their text was salutary, but I doubt if he convinced the public to as marked a degree as he thought. People who have pets or who have even a slight

first-hand knowledge of animals are still very apt to have an ingrained feeling that the animals use their wits much as mankind does — at least in a rudimentary way.

This is illustrated by the comments of one of Burroughs's old-time neighbors in the Catskills made to me on the subject. He said: "John wrote a lot about animals, and he claimed that man was the only animal endowed with brains and reasoning-power. I remember reading that into one of his books. He ought to have knowed more than to say such things. A good deal that he wrote wa'n't very accurate. He wrote what came in his head, I think.

"Of course animals reason. A cow is an easy-going sort of a darn thing, but, by gol! cows can learn a lot; and I've seen dogs that knew more than lots of humans I've met. I used to have one. Sometimes strangers stopped at our house for the night and would leave their teams and things in our barn. The next morning the dog would let 'em take their own things, but he'd make a row if they touched anything of ours.

"A cat is about as dumb an animal as there is, but not so dumb it can't reason. Horses can reason too. We had one that would drive cattle. When we were taking a bunch of cattle somewhere, we could get out of the wagon and never pay no attention to the horse at all. The horse would keep along in the road behind the herd. If a cow went through a gap,

he'd stop and wait for things to get straightened out before he started."

Burroughs's quality as a nature-writer has often been a topic of discussion among his readers, and their strictures have sometimes been rather severe; but I think it can fairly be said that the technical experts in his realm credit him with remarkable keenness of observation and with a number of interesting discoveries, and though it may be granted that he was primarily a poet in recording what he saw and felt, his statements seldom fail to be scientifically sound.



## XV

*July, 1909*

### CORRESPONDENCE

I JOURNEYED back into the Catskills one showery morning and reached Roxbury toward noon. Chauncey, one of the sons of Burroughs's brother Curtis, met me at the station in a two-horse express wagon loaded with bags of feed.

When we got to the old home we found Burroughs and the farm family in the kitchen. The chief features of the room were a long dining-table and a stove, a sofa in one corner, and coats and hats hung on nails around the walls. Curtis was sitting in his rocking-chair next to the big woodbox, where he could look out of the window. That had been his nook for years, and just in front of the chair his feet had worn a deep hollow in the floor. The entire floor was much worn, and the knots stood up prominently.

Now that every one was there, dinner was served. The sun came doubtfully through the clouds in the early afternoon, and Burroughs and I set forth for a walk. We climbed a pasture slope to a big glacial boulder that had been a favorite resort of his boyhood. He seated himself on it and looked off over the familiar landscape of great half-wooded rounded hills, and he examined crevices and holes in the rock that

he recalled to have been just the same more than half a century before.

The next day was Sunday. Burroughs wrote in his room upstairs much of the morning, as usual. After dinner we started together for a stroll, but presently parted company. I went to explore the Hardscrabble District, and he rambled in the fields hunting for birds' nests, eating bilberries, and napping, as he told me afterward.

I returned first and joined several of the farm folk who were in the sitting-room. We got to talking about Burroughs, and Curtis remarked, "Here's John has traveled all over the world, 'most, while I've hardly been out of sight of the Catskills."

This he said, not regretfully, but as a matter of curious interest.

"Yes, he's traveled a good deal," Curtis's wife agreed, "and yet he's always coming back here to his old home just the same. Our winter don't suit him very well, and he stays away then, but he's pretty sure to be on hand for a few days in sap-time. He don't help much with the sugar-making except to sometimes set in the sap-house awhile and keep the fire going and the sap b'iling.

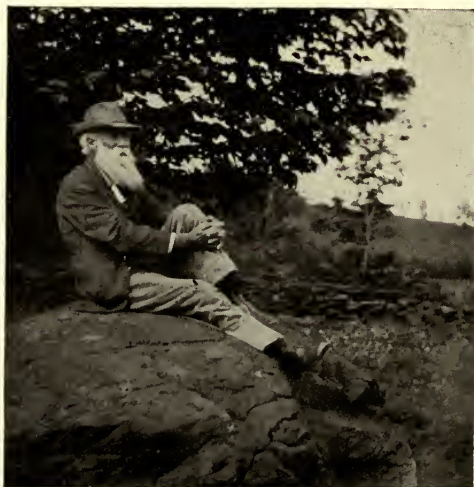
"A year or two ago he thought he'd like to have a little b'iling place to himself, the same as when he was a boy. We gave him what pans and kittles we had, and got some more at the neighbors'. He flew around here that afternoon and was just about crazy



*In the Doorway of the old Hay-Barn Study*



*The Old Farm Home in the Catskills*



*His Boyhood Rock*



to get his sap things ready. By and by he carried 'em up to the sap-bush, but a while afterward he come limping home. He'd had a fall. He said he wanted a stick to prop up a pan, and he saw on the lower side of a big maple a dead stub that he thought would do. He could n't pull it over. So he clim' up it and put his feet over against the big maple and pushed, and down he went. It was quite stony where he fell, and he was lame for three or four days.

"He talked about it a good deal and said he'd 'a' thought he'd knowed better — the idee! — if he'd been a boy it would n't look so foolish, but for a grown man there was no excuse. That ended his sap business, and he did n't even go up to get his things. Some of us had to bring 'em down."

"Uncle John likes to be here in haying-time too," Chauncey observed. "I don't know why, unless he enjoys seeing us fellers work. He never offers to do anything himself."

"Last summer," Curtis's wife said, "he hired an old house we own over the hill and brought some friends there to stay a few weeks. I worked about to death to get it ready for 'em, putting in furniture and cleaning up. They'd take walks and they'd lay around under the trees."

"Sometimes Uncle John would go fishing," Chauncey added, "and he'd ketch fish too. By gol! he got some good ones. Another thing he did was to pick up all the sticks he could find near the old house and

cut 'em into firewood. There was a stove set up outdoors, and he'd cook the breakfast on it. He wa'n't very particular how he looked, and he'd get all smoke and pot-black so you might take him for Rip Van Winkle. But he said the weeks he spent at the old house did him worlds of good, and that he always felt better up here in summer, the air and water are so much purer than down by the Hudson."

"John delights in dirt," Curtis's wife affirmed, "and he likes to see things layin' around a little. His wife is just the opposite. It's a wonder that two such different people ever married. She goes further than is necessary in trying to keep things so terribly clean. You're afraid to take any comfort, you got to be so careful about dirt and disorder. You look at her face — it's got a peculiar kind of a pucker. She's worrying about her housework all the time, and she'll make it hot for any of the family that don't do as she thinks they'd ought to. It's a disease, and when a woman has got a face like that you c'n know she's got the disease good and stout.

"About a year ago a girl I know went to work at Riverby. Aunt Ursula made her do everything in the way she was used to doing things herself, and finally, when she told her how to hold the dish-cloth, the girl would n't stand it and went back home.

"Then John and his wife got a woman relative to come in and help her and be a companion for her.

Aunt Ursula did the bossing while she and this relative cleaned the house so clean they could n't get it any cleaner, and after that they went out and began to scrub the barn. So the relative left."

"Some of us were down there in May," Chauncey said, "and Aunt Ursula had had fourteen different hired girls inside of two months. She'd have a new one every day if she could get one. They won't stay. She hires 'em in Poughkeepsie, and she sees to it that they're kept busy. If she can't think of anything else, she sends the girl out to scrape the doorstone. She might have that done eight or ten times a day, even if there wa'n't a bit of dirt on it. Yes, she's so cranky that every girl soon gets mad and leaves.

"When we was goin' into the house we rubbed our shoes as good as we could on the doormat, though the weather had been dry for a long time, and there wa'n't anything on 'em anyway, but she'd take a cloth and wipe up our footsteps, or where she thought they was."

"Well," Curtis's wife resumed, "John is a trial to her — more so perhaps than the average of men would be. He does things no one else would. I was at West Park once and went down to the river, where he and Julian were working on a boat. The weather was very warm, and he'd got so hot he was just about burned. In order to cool off he'd taken some shavings to put under his head, and laid down with

his body on the land and his head in the water so only the front of his face was above the surface."

"I remember," Chauncey said, "when Julian was a little boy, him and Uncle John was up here, and Uncle John wanted Julian to know the worth of a dollar. There was some brush and stumps needed burning, and Uncle John got us to offer Julian a dollar for every barrel of ashes he'd save from burning the rubbish. Well, sir, the little cuss would go out there and work all day, and he saved quite a few ashes."

"John has made considerable of a success with his books," Curtis remarked.

"I've read 'em," Chauncey said. "The travel parts are interesting, but I don't care much for what he says about animals and such things. Hiram used to tell him, 'Any blame fool can write about chipmunks and birds.'"

"John wa'n't like the rest of us," Curtis remarked meditatively. "As a boy he always liked to be tramping in the woods and climbing the hills and seeing the little wild creatures and posies. He used to go to the sugar-bush by himself in the spring and tap the trees and make sugar on his own hook. He never hunted much, but a few years ago he shot over a hundred woodchucks here one summer, just to keep the pests down. They're a great nuisance. You take fifteen woodchucks in a meadow, and they're as bad as two cows. They just eat off the tops of the



grass — that air kills the growth — and they tread the grass down and fill it with paths.

“This has always been a dairy farm, but John was never any great hand to milk. I don’t know as I ever saw him drive a team in his life. He did n’t like to hoe corn and potatoes very well, but he could n’t always git red of it. Haying was what suited him best. He used to help me in that long after he left the farm. I and John have done a lot of haying together. He was an awful fast mower with a scythe, and there wa’n’t many could beat him, and he was a good pitcher too. He was rugged and strong, and bigger and heavier than I was. He could do a lot of work if he was a min’ to, but it’s been a long time sin’ he’s cared to do much farming.”

I think the frankness with which the different members of the Burroughs family talked of each other was not peculiar to them, but was characteristic of the Catskills dwellers. The individuals found fault or commended with an engaging sense of detachment and intended fairness, and with great confidence in their own penetration and judicial poise. Their criticisms may seem sometimes blunt or harsh, but I would attribute the manner of them to the habit of the country rather than to a lack of underlying respect and affection.

This explanation applies also to the personal remarks of Burroughs and his wife. Each was irritat-

ing to the other in some ways, but in other essentials there was harmony. The wife's excellence as a housekeeper, in spite of its being rather extreme, and her thrift and simple habits, did much to relieve Burroughs of anxiety and to make possible the kind of life he wanted to live. Nor were his comments on her lacking in real appreciation of a companion whom he loved, whatever may have been her faults or his that to some degree kept them apart.

The language used by the farm family was rustic, and, curiously enough, Burroughs himself often dropped into the vernacular of his youth when talking with them, or with me. He used such words as *git*, *kag*, *crick*, *drawed*, *drownded*, and *ain't*. But at other times what he said was in the simple, beautiful English that we know in his books. He sometimes employed an oath for emphasis, but he swore after the manner of an ancient prophet, and it did not seem profanity at all of the careless, vulgar, or vicious sort.

On the Monday afternoon of my stay in the Catskills, Burroughs and I sat talking on the terrace in front of the house in the cool shadows of the maples while we watched the men in the steep field down the hill raking and loading hay. Again in the evening we sat there and looked across the valley to where the sun's low rays lingered on the eastern hilltops and gradually faded.

Burroughs took from his pocket a letter he had

recently received and showed it to me as an example of what the mail brought to him.

“One of the handicaps of being widely known,” he said, “is that it sets all sorts of people writing letters to you. In my own case the amount of mail I get of late years calls for so much attention that it is something of a burden. There are letters from friends and letters from strangers, and no end of circulars. The circulars all go unread into the wastebasket.

“People write asking about birds and other creatures they have seen, and they write to get my opinion concerning a great variety of subjects. Only last week a New Jersey man sent me a long list of impertinent questions on the scope of the novel and about a lot of other things. Correspondents tell me what they think about my books, sometimes praising them, sometimes pointing out mistakes they think they have found. Poems come to me from authors who hope for favorable comment and encouragement. I get prose manuscripts too. One novel I received that way I thought well enough of to turn it over to my publishers. They printed it and it had a large sale, though its literary value was rather slender. People send me flowers, they request me to address clubs or schools, they beg for my autograph, and they ask permission to visit me, or they invite me to visit them.

“Four fifths of my mail is from persons who want

some favor. These begging letters and the circulars are the damndest stuff you ever saw. I always swear when I open them. But I think I'm pretty good about responding to the letters, except that I often allow them to accumulate for a while. Then I go at them and have a house-cleaning — clear the decks, and say something polite and amiable to everybody, if I can.

“One youth, who has since become a popular novelist of the hothouse type, sent a long story with the information that he had betaken himself to the wilderness to write it; and you'd think he'd fairly sweltered with emotion all the while he was producing the stuff. He said publishers seemed to have a biased antipathy to his work, and if this story, written in solitude with such intense feeling, was n't noteworthy, he might as well quit. So far as I was concerned, I hoped he'd quit, but he did n't.

“A schoolmaster in the West favored me with a couple of books he'd written and a large portrait of himself. If a book is sent to me I always write to the sender, but I can't help feeling a certain resentment at the intrusion. I try to be honest in my response, though what I write is seldom more than an agreeable acknowledgment of the receipt of a volume.

“When a fair or some other charitable enterprise begs me for an autographed copy of one of my books to sell, I forward one.



“What demands the public does make on an author! I get requests for autographs constantly. If every reader of an author whose books circulate widely sent for his name, what would the poor fellow do? He’d simply be overwhelmed — crushed — and he’d go and jump down Niagara Falls.

“A good many people ask for sentiments. Sentiments are beyond me, but I did conjure up one once. I’d been trying to think of something appropriate when this doggerel popped into my head:

“‘He seized his pen, an oath he swore,  
And wrote his name for the autograph bore.’

“I suppose some little imps whispered it in my ear. I wrote it, but added a postscript saying it must n’t be taken too seriously.

“A young woman invalid wrote me that she wanted to conduct a department in a paper to inspire a love of the sea. She said the editors to whom she submitted the scheme were cross, and she wanted me to father the thing with my reputation.

“Another woman, soon after I built Slabsides, wrote that it was evident I was not well cared for living in that lonely woodland cabin, and she wanted to come and stay there to make me comfortable.

“A letter from a third woman referred to my poem ‘Waiting,’ and to my essay on ‘Strawberries,’ and wanted me to take into my home a man friend who knew nothing about green fields and who was working in a New York bindery and had consumption.

"From an Albany school for young women I had a letter that asked if I would spare a day sometime for a walk and a talk with a few of their teachers, and what would I charge? I replied that I would be glad to have them come to Riverby for the walk and the talk, and as to the charge I did n't know but I would be willing to pay them something for the pleasure their visit would give me. Not long afterward half a dozen young women got off the train and I spent a delightful day tramping and picnicking with them.

"One of them was an art teacher, and in the course of the day she asked if she could paint my portrait. I agreed, and after that she came with a companion on Saturdays pretty regularly for quite a while. We'd sit in the study. I'd look at one of them and talk while the other painted. Sometimes I'd read to them as I posed. One day I read a poem from Emerson which so touched the artist that she got up and went out. When she came back her eyes were tear-stained. On a later day, in a confidential talk, she told me about herself, and I found that she had quite a pathetic heart history.

"When she was starting the portrait I warned her that I was a hard subject, and that artists said I was never two minutes the same. Wyatt Eaton tried to paint me once and gave it up. I called her attention to the fact that one side of my face was very different from the other side. She painted very

persistently, but I'm afraid the picture was a failure. The nose was too large, the forehead and other details wrong, and yet I thought I saw a sort of family resemblance in the portrait. I had a brother who looked a little like it.

"I never know what sort of a surprise I'll get next in my daily mail. Letters are rather frequent from young men who say they want a farm and ask me how to get one. Some of these young fellows complain that they never have had an opportunity to be on a farm. I reply that they must make the opportunity. If they have a genuine desire in their hearts and are in earnest, they can find the way. It is useless to attempt to deal with the forces of nature as a farmer unless you love the soil.

"Once I had a nice letter from a man and wife informing me that they had a boy who at the age of fifteen was exceedingly morbid. He had no interest in anything and was losing his health. Then he happened on one of my books, and that seemed to open his eyes. Soon he had read them all, and now he liked to roam the fields and was an entirely different person.

"One letter that tickled me particularly was from a schoolboy, who said: 'I got one of your books through the mail, marked on the wrapper *second-class matter*. I have read it, and it is first-class matter. The binding and the get-up may be second-class, but the matter is first-class.'

“Those are examples of the missives the mails bring me; and I have visitors in no less variety — visitors announced and unannounced, visitors who are distinguished and those who are not, visitors who come because they know my books and like them, others who come because they have an axe to grind or out of idle curiosity, visitors who are cranks and those who are bores, and those who are a delight. Occasionally a visiting squadron numbers over a hundred.

“I remember one visitor at Riverby who was a famous artist. He came in style, dressed in his best as if for some Fifth Avenue social occasion, and I was in my old farm-clothes. He was an admirer of my work and a fine fellow, I guess. But he could n’t get out of the fashionable clothes atmosphere, and I could n’t get into it. We could n’t mix. When he was going away, he blurted out that he’d made a fool of himself coming to see me in such a rig, and apologized.

“On a recent Saturday afternoon a doctor who was a perfect stranger arrived at Riverby without any forewarning. He stayed on till evening and I invited him to have supper. I was doing my own housekeeping for a few days just then. After supper he said he would stay overnight, if I wanted him to. I told him I could take care of him, and I had him with me the next day. When afternoon came, I informed him that I had to be away for a couple of



hours, but he might make himself comfortable till I returned. To this he agreed, and it was Monday before he left. He was n't profound, and he talked mostly about himself. Heavens! what are you going to do with such a guest?

"Some of those who come cheer me and do me good, but I can't help feeling a certain strain over such a plethora of company, and there are times when it would be a relief to look forward to two weeks when I would n't have a single visitor. The letters I receive produce a similar effect on me, and if they'd stop coming for occasional periods I'd rejoice."

Tuesday morning Burroughs and I left the old farm to go to the village and get a train. We took a short way across the pastures and loitered in a patch of woods, where, under the rough projecting ledges, Burroughs found a phoebe's nest with young in it. He remarked on the security of its position and the impossibility of any animal enemies finding it or getting at the birds. Down below was a heap of rubbish, to which he called my attention — ruins of former nests, showing that the phœbes had built there year after year for a long time. When we had started on, he observed a little cave in the rocks and exclaimed because he had never discovered it when he was a boy.

## XVI

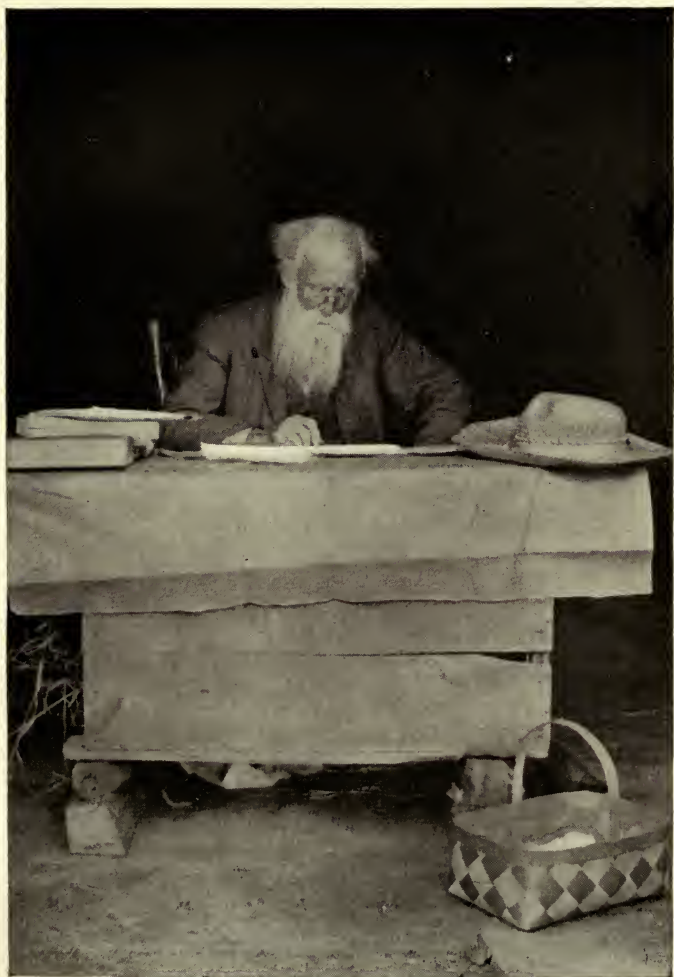
*August, 1912*

### WOODCHUCK LODGE AND THE HAY-BARN STUDY

I WENT again to Roxbury, and this time found Burroughs living in an old farmhouse which he called "Woodchuck Lodge." The building had originally been painted, but only faint traces of the paint now lingered on the clapboards. It stood on the borders of the ancestral Burroughs farm. Behind it were fields rising to where the maple trees of the farm sap-bush showed against the sky. In front was a narrow yard that merged into the highway, and then the land dipped down to a deep valley beyond which were big blue hills. At one side of the dwelling was a little garden.

A good deal of repairing and improving had been done to the house, and in the heaviest of this work Burroughs had the assistance of his nephew Chauncey, who was something of an expert in carpentering.

Presently I ran across Chauncey, and he said: "Uncle John had a great time while we were at that job. He'd write a little, and hunt woodchucks a little, but most of the time he was helping me fix over the house. I never in my life saw him take more comfort. But he wa'n't very careful of my gun that he borrowed to use shooting the woodchucks. He



*Writing in the Hay-Barn*



*Sitting at his Schoolboy Desk*



*Woodchuck Lodge and the Hay-Barn Study*



did n't have the proper kind of powder, and he did n't keep the gun clean, and finally he busted it. He stays up here through the summer and on into November. He don't spend any more time than he can help down at West Park."

Burroughs did his writing in a solitary, weather-worn old hay-barn a short distance up the road. There I found him, and I thought that the venerable author in his rustic apparel, which included a coarse, wide-brimmed straw hat, matched the surroundings very well.

I asked him if Slabsides had been abandoned, and he said: "The swamp there produced very creditable crops, but we had none of the bonanza years I anticipated, and the prices for some shipments would n't pay for packing and the express charges. One season the celery crop was a total failure on account of a hot, dry May. Amasy got discouraged, took to drinking, neglected his work, and finally moved away. So I let the swamp grow to grass.

"The charm of Slabsides had faded, and then I realized that the place in all the world that appealed most to me was the old boyhood farm, and that I was an alien elsewhere. I'd been homesick for over forty years. Yes, the past has a peculiar hold on me, and I'd been yearning for the scenes of my youth and for the contentment I found amid the familiar hills. The landscape had come to be a sort of outlying part of me, and it was a lucky day when

I decided that here I would spend the rest of my summers.

“I began to make the old dwelling yonder my warm-weather home in 1908. It was built by my brother Curtis in his young manhood, after father had given him half the farm. A snug old house was there already, but he concluded to build a larger and more convenient dwelling. Up to that time father had been comfortably prosperous, and he might have continued to prosper if he had n’t borrowed money to help build the new house. Curtis did n’t do well and could n’t repay the loan, and afterward father’s circumstances were rather straitened. I had to furnish money to keep the place in the family. I wasn’t at all sure I’d ever get back what I’d loaned, but I would n’t crowd for it. As things stand I’ve lost fifteen hundred dollars, but I don’t regret what I’ve done. The place is still home to me and always will be. I’ve spent most of my life somewhere else, but never have taken root in any other spot.

“Since I went out into the world I’ve frequently come back to the old farm. The air seems to agree with me better than that down by the Hudson, and how restful the long, flowing lines of the landscape are! No other region on earth compares with this for me.

“I recently had a call from some of my boyhood companions, who many years ago made their homes in Iowa and prospered. But you could n’t give me

that whole State if I had to live there. I think a flat prairie country would kill me.

"You'd think I'd escape visitors up among these remote Catskill hills. But, no, I have a pretty steady run of them. I've had as many as forty or fifty come in automobiles in a single day.

"The aspect of my native hills is the same I've always known, but agriculturally the region impresses me as more dilapidated than it used to be. Things are not kept up so snug and trim. Before the Civil War nearly every farmer succeeded with his farm. But since then they nearly all fail. They won't live as simply as in the old days — they must wear gloves and carry watches, and they smoke, and they drive fast. They seem to me to have deteriorated. They have n't the mental and physical vigor of their ancestors, are less picturesque and less individual. There used to be many odd personalities among them where now you find very few. The old-timers had more energy in doing good or doing evil, whichever way they were inclined.

"But in my boyhood the country was comparatively new, and the people retained something of the pioneer vigor and resourcefulness. Perhaps their descendants that have most nearly reproduced their type have moved on to other frontiers or drifted to the cities. I remember one man who, when he was drunk, would get out of bed in the middle of the night, hitch up a horse, and compel his wife to go

with him in the wagon for a wild ride across the pastures. That was his idea of fun. It was anything but fun for her.

“The Catskills dwellers are easily contented now, and are not very aspiring even in their pleasures. If they have enough to eat and wear, and have reasonably good buildings to shelter them and their farm animals and crops, they want little else. There is not much desire to travel, and they derive slight pleasure from literature. The local newspaper, the doings of neighbors, and visits to or from relatives, cover most of their interests beyond mere bread-getting. If a man makes more than he spends in his ordinary life on the farm, he does n’t plan ways to enjoy his surplus, but puts it in the bank, and his pleasure in his money comes from the contemplation of the gradually increasing deposit.

“The house that Curtis built had latterly been inhabited by various poor families and was a good deal dilapidated. I’ve laid new floors in the lower rooms, patched the broken plastering, built a woodshed, and put an ample rustic piazza on the front, and with my own hands I’ve made a considerable amount of furniture. I searched the woodland for crooked sticks to make the bow-legs of the dining-room table, and used other crooked sticks for my piazza balustrade, and to support my bookshelves.

“I sleep on the piazza, and I get up early, for when



the sun looks over the eastern horizon and points his fiery finger at me I can't lie abed.

"All the birds I saw in boyhood — apparently the very same ones — are here flitting and singing in their old haunts, and I see what seem to be the same chipmunks, squirrels, and woodchucks.

"For quite a while a sculptor has been boarding at a neighboring farmhouse. He has made some clay models of me. One is a bust. Another, about eighteen inches high, represents me seated on a stone wall looking off in a listening attitude with my right hand shading my eyes. The models are n't quiet and simple enough to please me. The bust reminds me of Roscoe Conkling, a politician whom I don't in the least desire to resemble. But I believe it does n't satisfy the sculptor either, and he's going to try again. When he is n't working on the seated figure, we keep it on the piazza. A screech owl lit on the clay head one night and left the marks of its claws.

"I call the place Woodchuck Lodge because the woodchuck tribe have their holes all around the house. I've had a good many adventures with them. Once I set a trap in my garden to save my peas from the marauders. The next morning I had Mr. Woodchuck by the paw, and he did n't look guilty a bit, but bristled up as if to say, 'These are my peas!'

"One day I tried to run down a woodchuck. That was a very absurd thing for me to try to do, but he was out in the field away from his hole. Well, I got

to the hole first, and he stopped to see what I'd do next. Not far away was a stone of suitable size for a weapon, and I said, 'If I can get that stone I can kill that chuck.'

"So I made a dash. I thought I'd get back to the hole before the chuck made a move, but he did n't hesitate a moment, and by the time I put my hand on the stone he was safe under ground.

"I had a study at the house, but I can't write when others are talking, and of course, if women are in the house, they have to talk. That disturbed the current of my thought, and I sought seclusion in this old barn. I'm closer to nature here than I was in the house. I open the big barn-doors, and then I have a wide near view of fields and woods. Some of my friends don't think this is a fit place for me, but the barn is n't occupied by farm animals and it's clean and sweet, and I like it.

"What do you think of my desk? I improvised it out of a big box that had been used for a hencoop, and by propping the box up on sticks I've got it the right height to suit me. Then I put some boards on top to make the desk surface more ample, and I covered them with brown paper. That gives me a desk on which I can set the market-basket I use to carry my manuscripts to and from the house, and there's plenty of space to spread out my books and writing paraphernalia. The hay-barn study attracts quite a little interest, and people come to look in at

the open door to see the man behind an old hencoop writing essays for the magazines.

“In the preface of my book ‘Riverby,’ published nearly twenty years ago, I said it was probably my final volume of outdoor essays, but the outdoor themes proved not to be exhausted for me after all. I got fresh stimulus in gathering new material by dwelling at Slabsides, and now I’ve changed my environment again by coming to live for the major portion of my time on the old farm. I find I can work here when I can’t work at either Riverby or Slabsides, and, best of all, I’ve been brought into contact with nature in ways that without shifting my abode I’d have missed.

“I’m lucky to have that apple orchard and stone wall close at hand out in front. They are regarded with great favor by the wild creatures. I often pause in my writing and sit enjoying the crows and squirrels and woodchucks, and the farm animals that are within sight or hearing. I’ve put up a hammock that I lie in when I want to rest. Morning is my writing time. Afternoons I go for walks, visit with friends, hoe in the garden, and pick off the potato-bugs, and perhaps I go gunning for woodchucks, which I’m obliged to shoot in self-defense.”

When we started to go to the house, Burroughs picked some apples from a drooping branch and took them along to have them made into apple sauce. His

house-companions just then were Dr. Clara Barrus, her sister, and a young woman artist from Georgia who was painting his portrait.

Dr. Barrus was a successful physician and a capable writer, who had been acquainted with Burroughs for some years and had seen the increasing need of relieving him from some of the burden that interfered with his physical comfort and well-being, and likewise with his gathering material for future books and recording his thoughts and observations. So she gradually gave up her chosen field of work and devoted herself more and more to his care, wherever he chose to be, serving as housekeeper, physician, and literary helper. There is every reason to believe that this prolonged his life and enabled him to write much that otherwise would have remained unwritten.

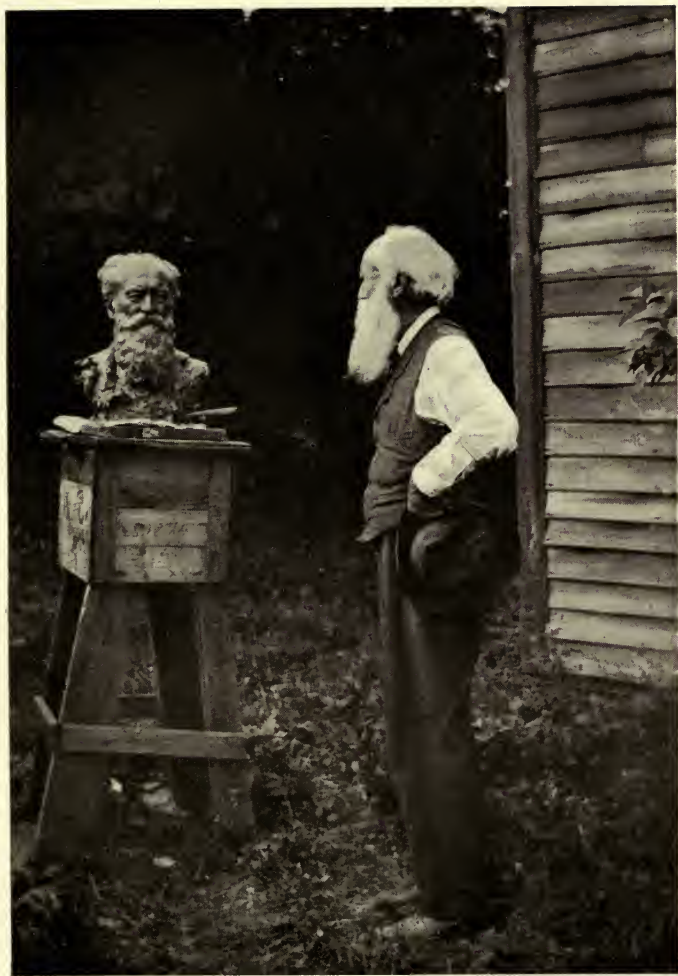
Burroughs posed for the artist in the early afternoon and for the sculptor just before dusk. The bust on which the sculptor was working was on a rough framework at the rear of the house.

In the middle of the afternoon we walked over to Burroughs's boyhood home. "Curtis died in June," he said, "and the place has a lonely aspect now. It is n't the same to me."

On the way back he noticed a squirrel hole by the roadside and stopped to look at it more closely.

Supper at Woodchuck Lodge was served on the piazza, but Burroughs did not eat. "I've been troubled by sleeplessness," he explained to me, "and





*The Bust and the Busted*



*The "Old Stone Jug," where Burroughs began going to School*



*The West Settlement Schoolhouse*

to overcome that I omit supper or take only a trifle. Oh! I have to be very cautious about my food, especially on festive occasions and when I'm away from home visiting. Last winter I spent two weeks in New York attending dinners which I could n't eat."

He brought out his Victrola and set it going. "I could n't live without it," he declared. One of the merrier tunes made him attempt a little jig to its accompaniment.

Bedtime came early. "I like to retire soon after eight," Burroughs said. "I wake about three, and get up at five."

A small rear upper room was assigned to me. The night was very quiet, and the most noticeable sounds that I heard were the water trickling into a tub at the back door and the eerie twitter of a little screech owl. About daylight I looked out, and there was Burroughs washing his hands and face in a basin set on a bench. When I got downstairs the fire was started in the kitchen stove and he was getting breakfast for the household, as was his custom. Things did not go entirely to his liking in his cooking manipulations, if one may judge from his exclaiming, "Oh! that milk is thick! Thunder and lightning!"

## XVII

*October, 1912*

ROOSEVELT

I REACHED Riverby in the early morning and found Mr. and Mrs. Burroughs in the kitchen. She was doing the dishes, and he had his mail before him on one corner of the kitchen table, the bare boards of which were whitened by much cleaning. The table was not devoted entirely to strictly kitchen purposes, for at the back were piles of magazines and newspapers. Other piles of periodicals were on the broad window-sill.

Mrs. Burroughs got about rather lamely, and complained of rheumatism and because Burroughs had n't told her till the last minute what time of day I was coming. He brought a lunch for me from the pantry, and she told him to spread a paper on the table before he set down the things. She soon left to spend the day in Poughkeepsie.

"Poughkeepsie seems to have a great attraction for her," Burroughs said. "I want to go to California this winter, but she does n't like to meet people. Poughkeepsie suits her for a winter resort, and I can't stand it."

After he had cleared away the food and the dishes,



we walked for a while and spent a little time with the two older of Burroughs's three grandchildren, Betty and Ursula, aged about six and four. The grape season was past, but we found a few clusters clinging to the vines, and Burroughs filled his hat and carried them to the house. He got dinner, a process which consisted mainly in preparing some soup. Each of us had a newspaper under our dishes when we ate. After we finished, Burroughs washed the dishes beneath the hot-water faucet.

"My wife would be horrified to see me washing dishes this way," he told me. "She would have me get a dishpan and put 'em in it and wash 'em in the formal, orthodox manner. But why not do things in the quickest way?"

When the task was done he remarked, "That little horse was soon curried, was n't she?"

Presently we went to the study under the brow of the hill. The day had grown warm, and numerous flies were buzzing about. Burroughs picked up from the table a stout rubber band and, as we talked, snapped at the flies that lit on his trousers, or shoes, or elsewhere within reach, and he rarely failed to hit his mark with fatal results. "That's a sudden and desirable form of death for the flies," he explained. "They never know what's happened to them."

He kept very steadily at this employment, and the floor became strewn with his victims as if a dish of huckleberries had been upset.

I asked him about his acquaintance with Roosevelt and he said:

"I first met him at a club dinner in New York in the eighties, when he had a ranch out in Dakota. He came and sat by me, told me how much he enjoyed my books, and invited me to visit his ranch. I thought him very vigorous, alive all over, with a great variety of interests; and it was surprising how well he knew the birds and animals. He's a rare combination of the sportsman and the naturalist.

"When he was elected Governor of New York State, he asked me to come to Albany, and I spent a day or two at his official mansion there.

"Not long after he became President he had me down to the White House for a few days. He was very busy, but one afternoon we drove out to the Rock Creek region and went for a five-mile walk. We walked like hunters on a trail, tearing through the woods and over the country. It was December, and slush and pools of water abounded. Roosevelt was fat and heavy, and he often took out his handkerchief to wipe the sweat off his brow. My underclothes got as wet as if I'd been in swimming. There was nothing to see. We simply had a walk. He talked most of the time, except when he got out of wind. We went as if on a wager until it was getting dark. We did n't have any extra clothing to put on when we returned to the carriage, and it's a

wonder I did n't catch pneumonia or something on our drive back.

"I dined at the White House and met Root and Taft. I can't say that I took to either of them. Roosevelt did n't put on any airs, and was n't a bit more authoritative than in previous years, but was the same cordial man, keenly alive to everything.

"In the spring of 1903 I went out to the Yellowstone with him. He was glad to get away from the crowd and enjoyed the trip like a boy. He represents the intense activity and energy of our present day in the best American sense, and it is all right for him, but if I were to live like Roosevelt I should die in a day.

"One time I asked him, 'What are you going to do when you get through with the presidency?'

"'Don't you worry,' he said. 'I shall find enough to keep me busy.'

"He ate three times what an ordinary man would, and assimilated it. He would use several spoonfuls of sugar in his cup of coffee. I was surprised to see him dump in the sugar. So much would have made me sick. But his digestion was good, and he had boundless energy and was a tireless worker. What a versatile live wire he is! He does n't hesitate to fight, if there's need, in order to put his policies through. I shrink from that sort of thing, and sometimes I'd like to kick myself all around the country for being such a tenderfoot.

“You remember what a serious coal strike we had in Roosevelt’s administration, and how the miners and mine-owners got deadlocked over their differences in a way that threatened national disaster. He said: ‘I called in J. Pierpont Morgan and told him I had a man appointed to take charge of the mines, and that the Government would get them in operation at once unless the mine-owners made a prompt settlement with the strikers. I was n’t going to be any James Buchanan, and by doing nothing let the country go to wreck. We’d have mined coal, and lots of it. Morgan was mad, but he saw I meant business, and he stopped the strike. He and the rest of those men don’t like me one bit, but I like them. They’re big men, but they’re narrow.

“‘I believe in being perfectly honest, and in fulfilling political promises. Our financial and industrial kings are finding out that my words have to be taken at their face value. The Republican platform bound the party to take some action in controlling the trusts. Senators said, “It’s all very well to promise, but action is another thing.” However, I insisted on keeping the faith. My methods are the same in diplomacy. There’s no dickering and nothing roundabout. I tell foreign powers just what I’m going to do, and it scares them. They don’t know what to make of anything so unusual.’

“Roosevelt fills a very creditable place among our Presidents. Washington belonged to the old order



of English gentlemen, and he fitted his times and did his work well. We had an entirely different type in Lincoln. He was n't an aristocrat. He was a very great man on his human side, and equally great on his intellectual side. He always looked worried and weighed down. There was no egotism in him. He was not thinking of himself or the impression he made. Calmness and repose were characteristic of him. He was patient, long-suffering, wise.

"Cleveland was another notable President. He had something of Lincoln's qualities. I saw him after he was President, and I shall never forget his look of honesty, humility, and genuineness.

"If only Roosevelt had a little of Lincoln's meekness and forbearance, what an improvement it would be! But he has that terrible domineering pugnacity and desire to be before the public. He goes to extremes in denunciation, and his treatment of former friends is sometimes distressing. I wish he would n't cheapen himself. However, although he is imperious, he is fair-minded, and I don't think he ever let the politicians use him in any unworthy way. I have absolute confidence in his sincerity and the integrity of his motives. He does n't rank with Lincoln or Cleveland, but he'll make a big spot of some sort on our history.

"One summer, while he was President, he came to see me. He and Mrs. Roosevelt voyaged from Oyster Bay up the Hudson in a Government steam

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yacht. They arrived on the 10th of July, the hottest day of the whole year. We walked from the river up to Slabsides, and Roosevelt sweat his white linen coat right through at the back.

“When we got to my swamp cabin, I had plenty of cold water, which he drank in copious drafts. I had baked potatoes, broiled a chicken, and cooked some peas picked right from the vines. Those peas were Telephone Peas, and there’s nothing this side of heaven equals them as a pea. Roosevelt is an omnivorous reader, and he went through my library at Slabsides in short order — gulped it as he would an oyster.

“Later in the day we went down to Riverby, and the neighbors came to my house there to meet the President and have some ice-cream.

“In the last year of his presidency he invited me to go with him down to Pine Knot in Virginia, where he said he had a ‘Slabsides.’ We made the hundred-mile journey in May in the President’s private car. Mrs. Roosevelt accompanied us. A farmer with a carriage met us at the station, and we drove to Roosevelt’s camp, ten miles from the railroad and a mile from the highway. His ‘Slabsides’ was a great barn-like structure standing in the woods. There was one big room that took up all the ground floor. In this the cooking was done at one end, and the table about which we gathered to eat or to spend our evening leisure was at the other end. Upstairs were two

or three bedrooms. Some colored people — a man and a couple of women — did the work, but at night went away to where they lived. .

“Roosevelt had taken me down to his camp in order to have me identify the birds, and we would drive to favorable places and then get out and stroll around. We identified about seventy-five birds in the four days we were there. He taught me two of them and I taught him two. It was really remarkable how well he knew the birds and their notes.

“We were there on Sunday and drove three miles to a little Episcopal church, where I listened to the dullest sermon I’ve heard in my life. All the gentry of the region were there, and I was introduced to some rather brisk, bright men. I don’t think any of ’em had ever heard of me.

“After service Roosevelt said he would show me a Lincoln sparrow. The day was warm, and we lay down in the grass in a field. Roosevelt actually relaxed, which was very unusual for him. But we talked. He is seldom silent in his waking hours unless he has a book to read. We waited an hour, but failed to hear our bird.

“When we were out another time, I mentioned that I had n’t heard the little gray gnatcatcher since I lived in Washington thirty years before.

“‘I’ll take you where you can hear one,’ he said. ‘Come on.’

“We went over a hill. ‘I’ve heard it here,’ he said.

“We stopped, and, sure enough, there it was!

“One evening, after the lamps had been lighted, we sat in the great bare lower room of the house. Mrs. Roosevelt was crocheting and the President and I were reading. I had a book he had recommended to me about the man-eating lions of Africa. Suddenly Roosevelt brought his hand down with a tremendous thump on the table. I was startled, for I had just reached the gruesome part of a lion story. Mrs. Roosevelt was startled, too. She turned to her husband and asked reprovingly, ‘Why do you make such a noise?’

“‘I was slapping a mosquito,’ he replied, but he struck it a blow that would have killed a cat.

“Once I said to him: ‘Mr. President, it seems to me it’s not safe for you to be here in this lonely place. Cranks who wanted to do you harm could get at you very easily.’

““Let ’em come! Oh, I can defend myself!’ he exclaimed, and slapped his hip. He carried a revolver. He’d have used it, too. There’s no doubting his courage. He showed himself to be without fear to the point of recklessness in the Spanish War.

“In my room upstairs was a flying squirrel’s nest, a mass of stuff on a beam. It consisted mostly of dry grass and bark. There were young ones in it which were old enough to begin to cut up. They went thrashing round the room and running over things after I’d gone to bed and kept me awake nearly all



the first night. When morning came I asked the hired man to help me put 'em out. But that didn't suit the President. 'I like the idea of having these wild creatures in the house,' he declared. 'Take 'em into my room.'

"He assisted in the moving, and one of them bit his hand. The blood ran down, but he said, 'Oh, I don't mind that!' and he hung on to the squirrel.

"We went out together one evening. The moon shone, and I saw a nighthawk on the ground. I said, 'I bet you can drop your hat over that nighthawk.'

"He would have, too, if his foot had n't struck a stick when he got close to the bird and scared it away. He was just as eager as a boy to get that nighthawk into his hands.

"Roosevelt was a big eater, a sound sleeper, always cheerful, fond of telling humorous stories, and his hearty laugh could be heard over the tops of the trees. Probably we never had a President who enjoyed the responsibility of that office as much. 'I like the big work,' he said, but added that it would be the happiest day of his life when he was free again and no longer needed to be on his good behavior.

"He'd picked out Taft to succeed him. Well, Taft is good-natured, but weak. I told Roosevelt, when we were down in Virginia, that Taft was not a strong enough man for the presidency, but he pooh-poohed, and said I did n't know Taft, and was mistaken in my estimate. But he found out I

was right after Taft had been in the White House a few months.

"Each time Roosevelt has met me since we visited the Virginia woods together, the first thing he's said is, 'Have you written up that trip yet?'"

"His craving for publicity is insatiable. I have n't written up the trip, and I never shall. I wrote a little book about our Yellowstone trip and a visit to his Oyster Bay home, and I've said all I want to say about my jaunts with him."

Like many of Burroughs's observations this final statement expressed his feeling at the time and it need not be accepted in entire literalness. As long as Roosevelt was alive it held. But after his death Burroughs evidently concluded to write the short account of their Virginia trip which is found in "Under the Maples."

Curiously enough, Roosevelt's enthusiasm for Taft waned and he became sharply critical, while Burroughs was won by Taft's support of the League of Nations to applaud his courage and statesmanship.

When Burroughs finished speaking of Roosevelt, he asked: "Have you noticed how the modern painters run to purple? I see more and more such pictures in the exhibitions every year, and they strike so discordant a note that they seem to rule the whole room. I want to blind my eyes. That sort of painting is a kind of disease, I should say. The pictures are night-

mares — like the bad dreams we sometimes have. I do declare they are sickening — that great riot of color with no accurate drawing! It's a debauch!

"The artists claim they see nature that way, but if they do their eyes are not normal. I believe such painting is a mere affectation. Certainly I don't see a purple world, and I don't think the fault is in my eyesight. You see purple if you go to Alaska — big gulfs filled with it, but it is melted in the air — spiritualized — wonderful! Heaven only knows what those fellows whose pictures are in the exhibitions would do with it if they attempted to paint the scenes.

"The feeling their pictures arouse in me may show that I'm no judge of art, and yet Gilder of the 'Century' often took me to exhibitions there in New York and evidently valued my impressions.

"I think I've learned now pretty definitely how to keep well. It's a knowledge a good many acquire when they're nearly ready to get through. I'm careful to eat proper food and not too much, and I keep watch of the machine to see that it's working properly. If I get tired in the forenoon and want to go and lie down, or if I have a headache, I know something is wrong. Then I take in sail in eating. At times a little calomel is helpful. That sweeps the clouds right away. It clears the skies at once. But I don't think I'd need it if I did n't eat too rich food. The modern cooking tempts me.

"Most of our physical ills drift in at the mouth.

Keep your digestion good and you are all right, but let the system get weakened by the unsatisfactory working of the digestive processes, and the germs rush to arms. There are germs in us all the time ready to seize such an opportunity; and whatever it is that pulls us down — whether unsuitable food or overwork or worry — is dangerous. If your system is in proper tone, tuberculosis could howl around you day and night and not effect a foothold.

“Why should we go blundering along paying doctor’s bills because we don’t know what to eat? Doctors have never helped me. I was occasionally subject to what old people called a bilious turn, and the doctors gave me quinine by the peck. But that wa’n’t what I needed. I understand the meaning of such an attack now. It’s like a red flag, and I say, ‘Here’s danger!’ and am on the alert.

“I don’t drink tea or coffee, or use tobacco, and I eat light suppers and am abstemious in the use of fruit — raw fruit especially. I think no one ought to eat raw fruit at night. The result of simple careful living is that I don’t have rheumatiz, and at the age of seventy-five I am about as spry as ever I was.

“The ignorance of the laws of health among country people is amazing. How the arrival of the doctor used to cheer them up in my boyhood when some member of a family was sick! To be sure, they’d wait till the ailing one was ’most dead before they sent for him, but they had great confidence in his



powers. He'd come galloping over the hills with his medicines in his saddlebags, and after he'd seen the patient and sized up the situation, he'd go to the kitchen and call for this and that, and prepare the remedy. The cure seemed certain, there was such an air of the inevitable about it all, and what great doses he would give!

"My son gets ready for winter by putting on double windows and making his house perfectly tight, and the family are sick half the time all winter long. They have dreadful colds — not only the children but the grown people — and I think it's because they don't get enough fresh air."

Burroughs talked more or less about his own health and health in general nearly every time I saw him. One might infer from what he said that he was something of an invalid, but really I think I always found him as comfortably vigorous as anybody could expect to be at his age. Even his stomach, which he so often referred to as his chronically weak organ, probably functioned pretty well on the whole.

Once he decided that eggs did n't agree with him. Another time he explained that mankind had several superfluous internal organs, and that if these could be safely removed the average life would be much longer. Various foods stirred his enthusiasm for somewhat uncertain periods. There was quite a while that his picture and commendation were widely published in connection with the advertising of a patent medi-

cine. He at first was convinced that he used this medicine with marked benefit, and he said it contained phosphorus, which was a brain food. The manufacturers furnished him free all he would consume.

He was inclined to make severe comments on those who used tobacco. "What habits people have!" he once said. "There's Alden, editor of 'Harper's Magazine.' He smokes only once a day, but that's all day. He sits in his office and sucks his old pipe the whole time.

"Most young fellows who go to college learn to smoke there if they have n't learned before. I'm thankful that Julian did n't acquire the habit while he was at Harvard."

As we loitered in Burroughs's study that afternoon, he went on to say: "Last winter I kept a wounded 'possum in here for several weeks. I nursed him till he was better and then sent him forth. Another time I had a flying squirrel in the study, but it made such desperate efforts to get out that I left a window open one night and let it escape.

"Skunk skins are high this year. You can get five dollars apiece for the best ones. With such a bounty, the young fellows are going to hunt 'em, trap 'em, go after 'em every way, and they'll clear 'em out. The skunk is a very useful animal. It eats a great many grubs and insects that are farm pests.

"Twice I've been chased by a skunk. The skunk

would come toward me flourishing his tail in a gay, jaunty sort of way, and I retreated in good order. Skunks are pretty sure marksmen, and I did n't want him to bring his battery to bear."

Burroughs had paused meditatively, when he suddenly jumped to his feet, exclaiming, "Good Heavens! did my wife say I was to meet her at the station? I'll go to the house and see if she has come."

He returned shortly, relieved to find that she was not there. We went together to meet the next train, from which she alighted loaded with bundles. She turned those over to us, saying, "I've done a good deal more running about trading than I ought to have done."

I suggested that perhaps it would limber her up and that she would be as spry as a cricket the next day. But she responded dismally that her rheumatism was sure to be worse as a consequence, and in the morning she would n't be able to get out of bed without Mr. Burroughs's help. "And what do you think?" she added. "I have to make the fire and get the breakfast before he comes downstairs."

"But why do you insist on having breakfast at half-past six?" he retorted. "At most places where I visit they don't have it until eight."

She thought that was scandalous and gave no chance for a proper start with the day's work.

## XVIII

*November, 1912*

### TRAVELS AT HOME AND ABROAD

LATE in the fall of 1912 Burroughs made one of his several visits to my farm home at the foot of Mount Holyoke on the bank of the Connecticut River. He brought with him a package of his favorite breakfast-food, and thus made sure he would not have to do without it.

The next day was Sunday, chilly, windy, and clouded. After we had breakfast we went for a walk up to a mountain-side pasture, where we discovered a strange ice formation on some weeds. Apparently the stems had been water-soaked just before the weather turned frosty, with the result that they burst and let the freezing water gradually exude to form a curious spiral icy efflorescence an inch or more in diameter. Burroughs was keenly interested, for he had never before seen anything like it.

As we crossed a mossy barren slope of the pasture he said, "If this was mine, I'd plough the daylights out of it."

He was always alert to see the possibilities of improving land, and the neglect of such possibilities, or waste of any sort on the farms, disturbed him.



There had been a severe cold snap very early that autumn, and many fields were strewn with onions that had been spoiled by freezing. He mourned over those onions — food, for which so many people were hungry, rendered useless. “And I’ve been paying ten cents a quart for onions recently,” he said.

I invited him to go to church, and he asked about his attire — would he have to change his soft shirt for a starched one? He hated the latter.

I responded that his beard was such a screen no one would know what sort of a shirt he wore. So he did n’t change it. The minister was a man of culture with a poetic temperament, and his sermons often had a good deal of charm, but, as luck would have it, this time he tackled predestination, which, to Burroughs, was an antiquated and perfectly hopeless topic.

After we returned home and had eaten dinner, Burroughs did some prowling among my bookshelves, and read and talked, and dozed by the fire. In one bookshelf nook he found Epictetus, Bacon’s Essays, Aristotle, and that type of literature, and it was with these books that he lingered longest and of these that he spoke with most affection. His own writings contain numerous references to famous authors, especially in philosophy, science, and poetry. Those quoted oftenest are probably Whitman, Emerson, and Darwin. Others that get frequent mention are Tennyson, Wordsworth, Gilbert White, Thoreau,

and Huxley, and, in his later books, Fabre, Bergson, and Maeterlinck.

We talked about the journeys he had made, in our own country and elsewhere. "I have never been a great traveler," he said, "but my wanderings have been fairly varied, and in my later years somewhat frequent. It seemed rather adventurous in my youth when I made excursions in the Catskills, camped in the Adirondacks, and visited New York City. I taught school a few months in the prairie country of Illinois, and I did some teaching in New Jersey. It was a notable enlargement of my horizon when I went to Washington to live.

"In October, 1871, the Government sent me and two other Treasury Department employees to England to exchange a new issue of bonds for old. We went over on the Scotia, a side-wheeler of the Cunard line, the last of that type of vessel used by any of the great trans-Atlantic companies. I'm a lover of the sea — from the shore. That's as near as I care to get, as a rule, for I'm a poor sailor. The voyage was stormy, and our vessel heaved and tossed so violently I thought she'd kick the horns off the moon. I fasted and kept to my bunk.

"We delivered the new bonds to a syndicate in London, and received the old ones, which we burnt. I remember how hard we worked. We burnt millions of dollars' worth of those old bonds. After the work was done, we were at liberty to look about awhile

before returning to America. I loitered longest in England, but spent a week in France, mostly in Paris, and had a chance to see something of Wales and Ireland. I enjoyed this Old World trip intensely. I was wild with delight the moment I set foot over there. Nothing I'd read had prepared me for it.

"I made a second trip abroad for about three months in 1882. My wife went with me and we took along Julian, who was then four years old. We landed at Glasgow in the middle of May, and visited the Burns country and the Carlyle country. We saw Loch Lomond and Loch Katrine; went to the land of Wordsworth, to Stratford, to Gilbert White's Selborne; and there were numerous other wanderings.

"I was interested to note the difference between the English and the Scotch. The former don't show much warmth toward strangers. You meet them, and they shut up like clams. But the Scotch are curious to know about you and your country. They show a great deal of studious thoughtfulness. I got acquainted with one family by asking a young man in a field a question about the birds, and in his reply he quoted John Burroughs to me. Then I introduced myself, and we had quite a talk, and he took me to his home to see the rest of the family. A few years later his father visited this country, and while here called on me. He was full of boyishness and eagerness to learn. He was like a bottle uncorked, and it was a pleasure to be with him. His enthu-

siasm was delightful to behold. Indeed, it was almost pathetic.

"It must have been about 1879 that I made my first visit to Boston and went to Canada, where I saw medieval Quebec, and voyaged on the St. Lawrence and the Saguenay. The trip up the latter river is tremendous — a feast of the sublime. The rocks, which at Cape Eternity rise sheer from the water to a height of eighteen hundred feet, dwarfed anything I had hitherto seen. Another jaunt was a camping-trip to the woods of Maine.

"Some ten years later I visited the Kentucky blue-grass region, and about the same time I made a trip to Niagara and journeyed as far west as the Mississippi. The great river was not to my eyes grand or impressive. It was an undignified devastator of the earth where I made its acquaintance. To see the wheatfields caving off and the muddy stream eating up the land was really painful.

"In middle life my farm absorbed the greater part of my time, and I was little inclined to stray from it.

"A period of more frequent roaming began in 1899, when I visited Alaska. Three years later I voyaged to Jamaica, and the next year I went with President Roosevelt to the Yellowstone National Park. I enjoyed the President personally, but not the publicity and the long journey. There were not more than three days that I did n't wish myself back at Slab-sides.



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“Latterly I’ve been apt to go to a warmer climate for the winter. Once my wife and I sailed for Bermuda, seeking health and pleasure. We found little of either, but plenty of the opposite, and came home depleted in purse and in physique. The long-tailed months don’t appeal to me.

“I tried Florida, but it did n’t please me at all. In general, it is level and monotonous. The forests are all haggled, burned, and wasted, and the houses stand up on stilts as if ready to run away.

“I’ve been down there to Edison’s winter home, but the first time I went to see a correspondent who lived on the Manatee River near Tampa. He’d been urging me to visit him for years. In some ways this man was interesting and original, but he was deaf as a post, smoked constantly, and insisted on getting close up to me and talking all the time. A few days were all I could stand. My pleasantest recollection is of the oranges which loaded the trees and strewed the ground in my friend’s orchard. I regretted I could n’t eat all the luscious fruit that was going to waste.

“In 1909 I visited the Grand Cañon of the Colorado, the Yosemite, and Hawaii. A couple of years later my wife and I spent a winter in California, and I’ve made several winter excursions into the South. I remember what an agreeable surprise it was to find the peach and plum trees in full bloom in Georgia the first week of March, and to hear so

many singing birds. But I always wanted to return North with the birds of my native latitude. I never liked to get back to my home haunts more than a day later than the robin."

Toward evening of this Sunday visit Burroughs and I drove to the top of Mount Holyoke. He was much interested in the volcanic basalt of which the highest ridge is formed, and in the ancient sandstone that buttresses it, and in the broad view from the summit of the alluvial valley, the winding river, and the long line of blue heights that rimmed the horizon.

On Monday we visited friends at Smith College and had lunch with the girls at one of the dormitories. Later we went to Holyoke and were shown through a big paper-mill. Burroughs was impressed by the marvelous processes and the long time it must have taken to evolve such magic methods, but I think he was relieved when the tour was over and he could get away from the steam and odors, the turmoil and clatter. He pitied those who had to work in such an environment.

Before we parted he went to a grocery store and bought a package of his special brand of breakfast-food to take along to the next place where he was to visit.

## XIX

*November, 1915*

### MAKING A LIVING

WHEN I got off the train at West Park one cool, breezy afternoon, Burroughs was at the station with a young fellow who he said used to be a newsboy and sold him papers. Now the youth lived in a neighboring town and had come to visit his old friend. The three of us went up to Slabsides by the roundabout road. Burroughs's breath failed him two or three times and he had to stop to rest.

"This is nice November weather," he remarked. "It's about the season for Indian Summer, but to be typical of what we call Indian Summer the air ought to be smoky and very quiet and dreamy.

"We are having a dry spell at present. The rain tries to fall, but don't make out. I always expect one extreme to follow another. We had a very dry spring, you know, and then three months of rain. The streams up in Delaware County were as full during the summer as in March. They carried away haycocks, swept through the cornfields, and tore up the roads dreadfully."

When we had gone through the woods to Burroughs's swamp, we sat for a while in his slab-sided cabin, and then rambled down the short-cut, with its

slippery strewing of fallen leaves. At the railroad station the ex-newsboy got on a train to go home.

After that Burroughs and I went to the cottage where Julian used to live. Julian had moved away from Riverby, and his cottage was now the home of Dr. Clara Barrus. Mr. and Mrs. Burroughs had their meals with her. When we entered the library, we found that the hanging lamp there had been lighted, and the smoke was streaming up from the chimney at a great rate. That made Burroughs exclaim over the "carelessness" of the person who had lit the lamp. He seated himself in an easy-chair and, as he talked, sometimes leaned back in repose, sometimes straightened up in animation, sometimes bent forward and doubled over with hearty laughter. He always laughed easily over the humor of his own experiences or fancies. The laugh was never loud nor long, but it was irrepressible and full of bubbling enjoyment. For the moment it had complete possession of him, and his pleasure was shown at the same time in the relaxing of his face into an expression that was oddly and contagiously convivial.

He always showed a keen interest in the news of the nation and the world, and his comments on political affairs were unfailingly independent, keen, and racy. He could be mirthful or indignant, and would applaud heartily or condemn with scorching vigor. What he said was often wise and delightfully illuminating, but he might at any moment go off on





*On the Piazza at the "Nest "*



*The Summer-House*



*The Cottage at Riverby known as the "Nest"*

some tangent and be amusingly naïve rather than profound.

Among the things of which he spoke while we sat there in the library was a serious sickness of his in the early summer. He said: "One day, after dinner, I picked two quarts of strawberries and brought them to the porch of the Doctor's cottage and gave them to her. Then I collapsed. She got me onto a couch. The trouble was with my heart. Its action had not been good for some time, and the only thing that saved my life was Dr. Barrus's first aid and her expert nursing. I did n't leave the porch for six weeks, and her care was constant day and night.

"Gradually I picked up until I was able to make the journey to Roxbury. There the improvement continued more rapidly. Last month I spent a week at the seashore, and I think the sea air and the sea food — especially the clams — had an invigorating effect. Now I'm beginning to write again, but though I'm getting back my health I shall have to take an easier gait henceforth."

He paused in his remarks and sniffed the air a little. "I still smell that lamp smoke," he declared, and he got up and opened the door. "I have a very critical nose. I can detect bad odors about as quickly as anybody in the world. That's one drawback to my going to the city."

After supper I talked with Burroughs until eighty-three. Then Dr. Barrus held a lamp while he found

his way down the porch steps, and started off to join his wife in the stone house.

The next morning, when breakfast was ready at seven, he came in at the back door bringing the mail from the post-office. He had been reading the newspaper and was indignant over the latest torpedoing of an Atlantic liner and eager to have America pitch into the Germans.

When breakfast had been disposed of, we adjourned to the bark-covered study and he built a fire. An upper sash of one of the windows had slipped down enough to let in the wind. He looked around on the fireplace mantel, saying, "I want to drive in a nail to hold up that sagging sash, and there's a stone here somewhere that I occasionally use instead of a hammer."

But he could n't find the stone, and he remarked testily: "I know what's the matter. My wife has been here fixing up things. Women, when they get to cleaning house, beat the devil — they certainly do! That stone was a complete circle — the only one I ever saw in my life — flattish in shape and broad as my hand. Confound it! she has no business to take my things out of here. But I suppose she said: 'There are plenty of stones. What's the use of that in his study?'"

After we had settled down in front of the fire I asked: "Won't you tell me how you've fared in making a living?" "Did n't you ever wish for wealth?"



In response he said: "I remember that when I was a little fellow a traveling phrenologist or mountebank came along one day to the old farm, and he fingered my head and said, 'This boy is going to be rich.'

"I suppose he knew that was what my people would like to hear. Well, if he'd gone up the road to the next house he'd have found Jay Gould, who was then a boy of about my age on his father's farm, and if he'd said the same thing of him, he'd have been a pretty good prophet, would n't he?

"Of course, we all need to have some money, but the secret of happiness is not to want a great deal. The accumulation of it ought not to be the main object in our lives. The most vital things can't be bought or sold. We should live simply and honestly, satisfied with a moderate degree of comfort and inexpensive recreation. I don't respond readily to calls for lectures or magazine articles because money is a minor temptation. I have enough. I don't want wealth — not for myself. I'd like it to give away. Even if I died wealthy, and in the natural course of things my son inherited all my property, I don't think he'd be the better for it. The modest amount I'm likely to leave is probably more than is good for him.

"I'm not a good business man — people cheat me so easily! I believe what they say, and they take advantage of me. Probably most of our writers and

persons of a poetic temperament are poor financiers. You can't hold their minds down simply to bargaining and questions of profit and loss. The business world is an absolutely selfish world. I do many things that a business man would snort at and berate me well for.

"I know I once sold a horse to an Irishman for one hundred and twenty dollars, and after he had kept him a year he brought him to me and wanted me to buy him back. The horse was as poor as a rack of bones, he'd got strained some, he balked, and he was worth very little. But I took him and gave the man a hundred dollars. That was pretty close to throwing the money away. The man was honest and hard-working, and he needed a horse. This one would n't do, and he had no money. He was trying to pay for a farm and I wanted him to succeed.

"Besides, I felt that I had not been entirely frank with him. When he bought the horse I told him the animal was high-spirited and needed careful handling, but I did n't tell him that he would n't stand being whipped or overloaded, and that gentle means were the only ones that could be used to get good results. Well, I have no regrets. I don't think a man is ever the worse for a kind deed. He's better in his heart, however it affects his pocketbook.

"Yet I'm not in the habit of making rash and unwise bargains. I inherit a cautious streak and don't go into wild scheming and the hunting for short-cuts

to fortune. I have no sympathy in the vulgar scramble for wealth we see so much of.

“When I struck out for myself and went to teaching school at the age of seventeen, there ensued ten years of very hard times for me. I could n’t seem to get on my feet — could n’t make a living for myself and my wife. I did n’t earn much teaching, and my efforts to make money in other ways failed utterly.

“At the end of the ten years I became a Government clerk in Washington, and things began to mend. I have prospered in a moderate way ever since. My income hasn’t been large, but I have spent less than I earned. Before I gave up my Washington position I owned a home there, and when I settled beside the Hudson I soon paid for my farm and a substantial house. Later I bought adjoining land and doubled the farm acreage.

“My wife was greatly opposed to this investment. She was sure I could n’t handle so large a place; and she is much better at business than I am. The man who can cheat her must be a clever fellow. She knows just what meat, dry goods, groceries, and all those things ought to cost, and an overcharge of two cents she will no more bear than an overcharge of two hundred dollars. She’s an economical housekeeper down to the smallest details. Yes, and she can give me points on trading any time. But I have n’t much fancy for stewing and quarreling over small amounts.

I think a woman's business genius is apt to run to that sort of thing.

"Naturally, it was easier for me to keep the balance on the right side of the ledger in making a living because I had only one child. I've always wished I had half a dozen; and yet if that would have meant a dull grind of poverty and no leisure for loitering with nature or for writing, and perhaps the missing of Whitman and other friends, I don't know that I'd be willing to make such a sacrifice.

"Without some degree of freedom from business worry and unceasing manual labor I could n't do my best in absorbing impressions or reporting them. I have no desire to exert myself continuously in farming or anything else. One of my Riverby neighbors is a man who's on the jump looking after his affairs from morn till night. He has n't a lazy bone in his body, but I have lots of 'em. I'm not a persistent worker, and haste and I don't agree.

"For many years the income from my writings was very small, and I was chiefly dependent on such salaries as I received and the profits of my farming. When a hailstorm nearly ruined my grapes one year, I felt quite overwhelmed and was glad to pick up a little extra money lecturing. I even started on a lecture tour. I'd talk about nature without depending on either manuscript or notes. Once, in the middle of a lecture, I thought I'd got to the end of my tether. What I was going to say next I did n't know,



when a great moth flew in at a window. So I talked about that and went smoothly on again. I did n't encounter any very formidable difficulty in this lecturing job until I appeared before a Dutch audience in Pennsylvania. There those people sat, stolid and unmoved from start to finish. It was more than I could stand, and I brought my lecture tour to an abrupt termination.

"I rarely ever say anything about price when I'm selling an editor an essay I've written. I take whatever is offered me, and that is the end of the matter. Once a syndicate asked me to write a two-thousand word article on 'The Birth of Summer' for thirty dollars, and I did. The price satisfied me well enough, but when I chanced to tell Mr. Howells of the transaction he said two hundred dollars was nearer the right price. The 'Century' paid me best — so well, in fact, that I was always astonished at the checks I received and felt as if I ought to send back part. One leading magazine was apt to trim, and to fall short of living up to its agreements. I'd make them come to terms, but there was left such an unpleasant impression in my mind that I quit writing for it.

"What is now Houghton Mifflin Company have published my books. The sales were small for a good many years, and as a consequence my income from royalties was small likewise. But there was a gradual trend upward, and after a while the firm began paying me an annuity in quarterly installments,

plus a royalty on the first eight months' sales of each new book.

"At times I thought of taking a book manuscript to some other firm but always was persuaded not to. Mr. Houghton said a publisher and an author were like man and wife and should n't be separated. I could n't quite see the analogy. If he was the man, I had only one husband, but he had a whole harem of authors.

"Julian graduated from Harvard with honors in 1901, and I wanted him to come and live at Riverby, but his mother thought his education would be thrown away if he did that. She said that he ought to go into something to make money, else what good did his education do him? She could n't see that education is a valuable thing for its own sake, and that the trained mind should be able to get far more satisfaction out of ploughing and other rustic work than a poor ignorant clodhopper would.

"Well, Julian came back home, and the next year he married and built a cottage near my study. I greatly enjoyed helping with the house-building. The annuity from my publishers was increased from time to time and about 1905 I decided to turn over my farm, rent free, to Julian. I had six thousand dollars in the bank. I was selling some magazine articles, and apparently would have an income of about twenty-three hundred dollars, which was enough for my wife and me to live on. Things were

adjusted nicely, I thought, and the prospects seemed rather rosy, but the prices our grapes brought went steadily down and the farm expenses kept going up. California grapes took the cream off the market, and we were n't getting half what I got twenty years before. Also the express companies and middlemen apparently had a habit of absorbing more than their share in handling farm produce. For instance, it would have paid to ship apples from the Catskills, even if the growers did n't net more than fifty cents a bushel, but the farmers did n't dare ship 'em because they were afraid they'd get in debt. It has often happened that a man has shipped produce to a commission merchant and not only received no pay, but was sent a bill for express.

"What Julian could get out of the Riverby place dwindled, and at length he moved away to become the manager of a millionaire's farm in the neighborhood. He has sometimes said that he wished I had n't persuaded him to stay at home instead of going out into the world to make a place for himself as I had done.

"We pulled up half my vineyards after he left, and have managed things in a sort of makeshift fashion ever since with the hired man in charge. There's no profit. The place barely pays for itself. But in a financial way, taking things as a whole, I've fared well enough. When my publishers made their last increase in my annuity, that and other receipts gave

me a total income of about thirty-five hundred dollars, and I did n't spend it all by considerable.

"I congratulate myself that no member of my own household is lacking in thrift or has had a prolonged and severe illness to tax my resources. I've been able to help certain of my relations in time of need, and also some of my neighbors, and to contribute to occasional charities. Besides, I've traveled somewhat freely, and in my later years, have gone to a warmer climate for the winter when I chose. I had an early period of hardship, but in the main I've made a living that has satisfied me, and have done so without undue exertion or any serious sacrifice."



## XX

*October, 1917*

### EDISON AND FORD

It was shortly before six of a mild, quiet morning that I walked from the West Park railroad station over to Riverby. For a while I sat in the little summer-house looking off over the river and to the shore beyond veiled in delicate blue haze. Up the slope behind me was the barn, and by and by I saw the Riverby hired man plodding from it to the well for water. I joined him, and he said: "Mr. Burroughs was expecting you yesterday. He went to the train early in the afternoon and again in the evening to meet you. You'll find him at the Doctor's cottage. He's always up by six o'clock. Dr. Barrus is away for a few days and he's alone there at present."

I went to the back door and rapped, and he welcomed me into the kitchen, where he was preparing breakfast. He looked well and seemed active and cheerful and as alert mentally as ever. He fried bacon, and he warmed in the oven some puffed wheat, which he had recently adopted as his breakfast-food. The oven was hotter than he thought, and when he opened the door to take out the cereal a scorched odor warned him that all was not right. He snatched out the plate of puffed wheat with a lively exclama-

tion of disgust and slid the blackened, smoking mess off into the fire. Soon he toasted another lot, and we sat down at a small table there in the kitchen and ate.

"I'm no housekeeper," he affirmed, but I had never known him to fail to make the food he served palatable, in spite of accidents due to his thoughts straying elsewhere, and he always did the dish-washing and tidying-up promptly after a meal. In fact, for a man and a famous author, and a conversationalist of rare breadth of interests and imagination and loquacity, he succeeded notably well in his activities as cook and maid-of-all-work.

When he had finished the kitchen tasks we went to the post-office for his mail. On our return we made ourselves comfortable before an open fire in the bark-covered study, and he read aloud much of the war news in his New York daily and discussed that and many another thing. Besides he told me a little of what had happened in his own realm since we had met.

"Early last year," he said, "my wife and I went to Washington and were taken sick there. Then we concluded to go down to Georgia, but our diseases took the same train. We got worse instead of better, and came back home. I fully recovered in a few weeks, but my wife steadily failed. Her ailment was old age — a general breaking down. She died early in March after a year of suffering. I helped take care

of her here at West Park much of the time. But toward the last I could n't sleep and had to get away. I did n't want to be with her at the end. Now the house up the hill that we built for ourselves when we were young is empty. We lived there together forty-three years, and it rather distresses me to look at the old vacant dead home. I would n't have thought I could miss her so much. Well, I too will pass on soon.

"I barely missed ending my days last spring. My Ford overturned up here on our fine macadam road and came down on top of me. It broke the bone in my arm close to my shoulder. The weight of the car pressed against my chest, and I could n't speak. Some workmen were passing along the road near at hand, and they hurried to lift off the car. Their prompt help was all that saved me. It was very fortunate, too, that the car was no heavier. If you are going to be wrecked in an automobile choose a Ford every time.

"The doctors said I'd never get the use of my arm again, but the bone has knitted, and I did n't need to carry my arm in a sling any longer than a much younger man would have. The arm is almost as good as new now.

"For some time before the accident Ford had been urging me to accept another car. But I told him that discarding the old car while it was so good would be sheer waste. I don't like to throw away anything. However, the old car got badly bunged up in the

overturn. Ford wanted me to have a sedan, but that was too fine for me, and I would n't take anything better than the ordinary type of car to which I was accustomed.

"I'm being pretty careful of my health. A sickness with me is apt to begin with a cold in the head. I sneeze and cough and blow, and if I consult a doctor he says he will give me something for my throat.

"But I tell him, 'I don't want it for that.'

"The cold is just a symptom — a warning red flag. To go and pull down the red flag does n't do any good. There's half a dozen of these red flags I'm onto. That sickness I had a few years ago has made me thoroughly awake to the need of watchfulness. I gad! they said my heart almost stopped. Again and again the demon pursuing me nearly gets his hand on me, but so far I've been able to shake him off.

"I was invited to the Howells eightieth-birthday dinner in New York. But I did n't go. In the first place I can't eat at night. 'T would make me sick. In the second place I'll be hanged if I'll pay three dollars for a dinner in these times. I won't pay five dollars for a room either. Half that amount is my limit."

Mrs. Burroughs was buried with her own people at Tongore. The site of her native village is now covered by the waters of the Ashokan reservoir, but



the bodies in the local cemetery were transferred a few miles to Tongore, which is on higher ground. It was there that Burroughs began teaching, and the little red schoolhouse of his time was not superseded until 1920. The place is a forlorn, shapeless hamlet on low, hilly land, with high mountains lying to the west but not near enough to relieve the monotony.

Two of Burroughs's most valued friends in his later life were Edison and Ford. He often spoke of them, and always with appreciation, but of course with some comments on their characteristics that showed he thought them quite human in falling short of perfection.

"I first met Edison," he said, "about 1905 at Orange, New Jersey. He's a hard man to talk with, he's so deaf. You have to get up close to his ear and howl into it. His voice is crude and commonplace like that of all deaf people. If you happen to touch the right string, and the company suits him, he talks freely, with wisdom and humor.

"I asked Mrs. Edison one day if he ran his own automobile. She laughed at the idea. His mind wanders too far afield for him to safely take the responsibility. Besides, he has n't manual dexterity. He works with his head, and his assistants do the rest. There is a curious vacancy about the look of his hands.

"One winter I was two weeks with him down in Florida at a place he has there on the west coast.

His establishment consists of three houses in a grove of tropical trees, and it's very comfortable and even luxurious. The place is on the banks of a shallow river that comes from the Everglades, and a long wharf runs out into the stream. Edison is a great man for fishing. Every day he's out in a launch or a rowboat trolling for fish, or he sits on the end of the wharf with his line in the water. At the same time he's fishing in his mind for ideas, and he's very sure to get a bite at one end of the line or the other — sometimes both. He ponders on all sorts of things in heaven and on earth. His mind is very speculative, yet very practical. In the varied and exact knowledge that his head contains he's like a cyclopædia.

“He enjoys the woods and country, but it is his laboratory that he loves best. He hates to leave it and get away from the smell of chemicals and the hum of wheels.

“I understand that he's able to get along with a ridiculously small amount of sleep. Often he's up all night and tires out his helpers, but he always takes a nap in the daytime.

“A while ago he was awarded a Carnegie medal, and there was a big blow-out in New York to present it. His wife had hard work to get him over to the affair. They could n't induce him to speak. He's a man of deeds and not of words. ‘Oh, this everlasting palaver!’ he grumbled. ‘We run too much to talk in this country. I want to be with men who do things.’

He was disgusted with all that nonsense going on over him.

“Once a friend asked to be allowed to bring a mind-reader to see him.

“‘He can come,’ Edison said, ‘but he can’t humbug me.’

“The mind-reader came, and Edison wrote on a slip of paper a chemical formula known only to himself. To his amazement the mind-reader told him what it was. Then Edison wrote the name of his first teacher, and the mind-reader gave the name correctly. Edison explained to me that there must have been something that went from his brain to the mind-reader’s brain, just like bees from a hive.

“Once he and I spent a few days at the summer place of Colgate, the wealthy soap-manufacturer, and he ridiculed the way I ate — told me I ate three times too much.

“So I said, ‘While we are here I’m going to keep pace with you in this food business.’

“That evening we sat down to dine. The Colgates had a good cook and there was a nice dinner. The soup was served, but Edison said to me, ‘You don’t want any slop like that.’

“We refused it, and also the fish course. Meanwhile we nibbled toasted pieces of whole-wheat bread. Some chicken was brought in. I followed Edison’s example in dipping the gravy onto the toast and we

had a helping of creamed potatoes, but we took none of the meat. Squash was offered to us, but he said: 'Don't eat squash. Nothing which slips down as easy as that does you any good.'

"The ice-cream and pudding that came later did n't tempt him. Water was his drink. 'Eat plenty of toast with a lot of butter on it,' he said. 'In that combination alone you have all the elements of a complete food, and it compels chewing.'

"He smoked a cigar after dinner. I drew the line at that for myself. 'Oh! you need n't scowl,' he said. 'I'm so good in most other things that I'm going to allow myself this one indulgence.'

"While we were at Colgate's he would take no meat at breakfast, though he said: 'I sometimes eat a mutton chop at home. But there I am at work. Here I'm not doing anything and don't need so much nutriment.'

"However, he drank a cup of coffee. 'That pushes you along half a day,' I told him. I did without it.

"He would n't eat fruit or anything else that had n't been subjected to a heat of 212 degrees. He has microphobia and is a crank on the food subject. But he has a big body and thrives on his spare diet. Probably he does n't need half as much food as the average person because he does n't take any exercise. He is n't entirely free from trouble with his stomach either. One reason for that is a way he has of eating, in a fit of abstraction, whatever happens to be at



hand. The result is that his stomach is left in the lurch. He'd forget to eat at all if his wife did n't shove the things up in front of him.

"When I got home after three days of his fare at the Colgates', I was so hungry that I was in a tremble all over.

"One day I got a letter from the man at the head of Henry Ford's advertising department saying that Mr. Ford had read my books and they had given him a great deal of pleasure, and he wanted to make me a present of a Ford car. I did n't know what in the dickens to think of such an offer, and I talked it over with my friends. They advised me to take the car, and I wrote back, 'If it would please Mr. Ford to present me with one of his cars, it would please me to accept the car.'

"So on the first day of the New Year, 1913, lo and behold! a Ford automobile came on a train, and with it arrived a man who arranged to have it kept in a garage at Poughkeepsie, where my wife was staying that winter. The garage was to attend to any repairs that were necessary from time to time at Ford's expense, and a chauffeur was engaged, likewise at Ford's expense, to take me out in the auto and show me how to drive it.

"Once, after I'd begun to run it alone, I came to grief, repairs had to be made, and I gave the neighbor who housed the car a check to cover the cost; but he

let Ford know, and Ford had the check sent back to me.

“That very June, Ford wanted me to come out to Detroit, and I went. I found him an earnest, big-hearted, ordinary man whom I liked at first sight. His personality was very attractive. He’d never lost the simplicity of his early plain living on the farm. That’s the place for big men to start, and Ford was the real thing, a man of sterling quality. He was a mighty good talker in his own field, but crude in his philosophy. His philosophic ideas were those of a man who’d turned his attention in that direction late in life. Sometimes I thought he was a Christian Scientist, and sometimes I thought he was not.

“It seemed that by chance he had read one of my books and enjoyed it so much that his wife bought him a full set. She said the books had quite a marked effect on his attitude of mind. They started new currents in him that have stuck by him ever since, and he was no longer utterly absorbed in his car.

“I strolled in the woods with him and stayed at his bungalow and we walked through his factory. I could hardly believe in the magnitude of his product until I saw the completed cars coming out one a minute. While we stood looking at the cars as they rolled forth, he pointed to one which was a little finer in its fixings than the others and said, ‘That is for you.’

“‘Why, you have given me one already!’ I said.

“‘But that won’t last forever,’ he told me. ‘You need another. It’s nothing to me — just a little money — and what does that amount to? Giving away a car is no more to me than giving away a jack-knife would be to most men.’

“Well, I suppose that’s so. He planked down two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to start a hospital out there in Detroit. The new car came to Riverby and I let Julian use it. For some reason or other it proved to be a kicker. One day, when he was cranking it, the handle flew back and broke his forearm — broke both bones square off. It kicked at him again the other day. It’s like a kicking horse. The habit is one that neither a horse nor an automobile ever gets over.

“But my car has n’t raised a hoof. Lately Ford has had a self-starter sent up from New York and put on it, and a new steel radiator. He’s done lots of things for me. When I thank him, he says: ‘Oh, that’s nothing to me! What’s the use of mentioning it?’ He’s just that generous.

“One time I was telling him about a friend of mine in Georgia who is employed by the State in the Agricultural Department. He travels around the country and does a great deal of good. ‘I wonder if he would n’t like a car,’ Ford said, and he sent him one.

“While we were on a trip to Massachusetts once,

a heavy thunder-storm passed over the region we were in. The next morning we came through a piece of woods out into an open, and there were the smoking ruins of a farmhouse that had been struck by lightning. An old man and woman sat in chairs under a tree. Ford stopped, got out of his car, asked about the disaster, and learned that the old couple were the owners of the destroyed dwelling. Then he fumbled in his pocket and took out a hundred-dollar bill and gave it to them. He inquired how many there were in the family, and they spoke of a granddaughter who had intended to go to the high school in the fall, but now could n't because her good clothes were all burned. Ford took out another hundred-dollar bill and gave it to them to make good the girl's loss. They hesitated to accept so much, but he said: 'Never mind. What do I want of the money? I've got plenty more.' And the tears ran down their faces as they thanked him.

"Edison and he are warm friends. He's the more practical business man of the two. Edison is like Agassiz, who said, 'I can't afford to make money.'

"Once a clique of capitalists had a trap fixed to get control of Edison through his need of ready cash. Ford met Edison about that time and learned of the situation. 'How much money do you need to get you out of this hole?' Ford asked. -

"Edison told him. The amount was enormous, but Ford immediately wrote a check for the sum



named and handed it to his friend, saying, 'I can't let you fall into the hands of those fellows.'

"I never heard any one else abuse the capitalists as he does. He howls against them as bad as any anarchist. Yes, he pitches into the whole banking fraternity, though it is with the banks that he leaves his surplus money. He does n't invest in stocks and bonds, for he won't put his money where the capitalists could wield it as a weapon.

"Ford is the cleverest man with his hands that I ever saw. One day, when he was out with a party of us, we found an apple, and he got an axe at the side of a barn and divided the apple with the greatest deftness into equal pieces, one for each of us.

"Once, when he was at Riverby, he observed that one of the clocks did n't work right. That led to his informing us that he began his career clock and watch repairing, and he tackled the clock and soon got it to behaving properly.

"We had a box set up for the wrens to nest in, but the English sparrows invaded it. 'I'll fix that bird-box,' Ford said, and he did it so neatly that, when he finished, the box admitted the wrens, but the sparrows could n't get in at all. They tried it and then scolded us for the rest of the day.

"I remember a time when we'd stopped at a hotel on one of the trips we made, and he strolled off across the fields to where a man was sawing wood with a gasoline engine. The man told Ford of certain

things the engine would n't do, and Ford looked it over and quickly found and remedied the trouble.

"Osborne, who made a reputation for efficiency in handling the prisoners at Sing Sing, got Ford and me to come there to see them. We watched them marching in squads into the dining-room to the sound of music — eighteen hundred of them. After they were through eating, Osborne escorted us to a raised platform and made a little speech, which he ended by saying, 'I want you to know who these men with me are.'

"They'd heard of Ford and cheered him heartily. The applause I received was decidedly milder. Osborne called on Ford to address them. Ford was perfectly helpless. He got up and made some such remarks as 'Boys, I'm glad to see you here. I've never made a speech in my life and never expect to.' Then he sat down looking kind of sheepish and ashamed.

"But the problem they presented made its impress on him. He said to me, 'I could take a lot of these men and make good citizens out of them by giving them a show and square deal.'

"Perhaps he could, though I should say that eighty per cent of them were perfectly hopeless. They had vacant faces and big jaws and looked stolid. One of the three head men in Ford's factory was a jailbird a few years ago. Ford had brought out the man in him. Yes, Ford's heart is in the right place,

and his head's all right too. He's an optimist. He has a sweet nature, and nobody who's personally acquainted with him can help liking him.

"I would give Ford credit for benevolence in paying his men five dollars a day and letting them share in the profits. But he says it was simply a good business move. It gives him the pick of the workers in the labor market. The business is theirs as well as his, and they are stimulated to do their best. Apparently the men were doing all they possibly could before. They thought so, but with the lift in remuneration they at once showed increased effectiveness.

"One winter day, when I was a boy, old Nat Higby came riding along on his horse. He was a long-legged, big-footed man of a type that seems to have disappeared now. He stopped and pointed to a fox which was being followed by hounds on a distant hillside. 'That fox is running just as fast as it can,' he said, 'but if you were to jump out from behind the rock just above it and holler "Boo!" it would go faster still.'

"Ford's men were doing their best, but when he applied the right stimulus they did better than their best.

"There was a letter in my mail this morning from a man who wanted me to get him a place with Ford. But I ain't going to ask any such favors. I don't know how many people have been after me that way. On an average I get such a letter every week.

“When I first began to run my car I was afraid of the thing. An automobile is the same as a horse — if you are afraid of it it’ll play you a trick every time, and I’ve had several rather startling experiences with mine. When I’m up in the Catskills at Woodchuck Lodge, I keep the car in an old barn and have to run it up a steep rise to get in the door. I was always timid about that on account of the power I had to use and the necessity of shutting it off promptly. I said to myself, ‘If you lose control you’ll smash right through the other side of the barn, where there’s a fall of fifteen feet down onto some rocks — and there you’ll be!’

“I woke up one night and decided to get a rope and stretch it across the back of the barn floor to bring my car to a stop if I failed to stop it myself. Morning came, but I did n’t put the rope up, and that very day I took my car out for a ride. When I came back and started to go into the barn I was scared. Chauncey, my nephew, was looking on, and he said I went into the barn as if the devil was after me. I crashed through the boards at the back, and the front wheels went over the sill, but something underneath the car caught on the edge of the sill so the car did n’t quite tip. Only for that I’d have been in eternity.

“My friends lifted their voices in a chorus, declaring that I should n’t run the car any more. I promised I would n’t, and a young fellow who was



living with us acted as chauffeur the rest of the season. But in the winter I was down in Georgia visiting a man who had a Ford, and I got to running it on the level roads there and lost my old fear.

"Once, when Ford was out with me in my own car, he said: 'There are two things you must n't do. You must n't go fast in ticklish places, and you must n't take your hands off the steering-wheel to point.'

"Now, if I have a little bit of an anxious feeling on the road, I say, 'Go slow,' and I keep my head.

"And yet only two nights ago my discretion failed me. I was out with the car, and as I approached a sharp turn in the road I saw two men coming. That seemed to hypnotize me. I was so afraid of running into them that I turned out till I gave them eight feet leeway. I could see nothing and think of nothing but those two men. The result was that I took the bark off from a roadside tree, and my engine stopped.

"'Did n't you think we knew enough to keep out of your way?' the men asked.

"'Yes, of course I did,' I answered.

"Oh dear! ha, ha! The root of that sort of trouble lies in the subjective self. It's a curious psychological problem. But I've had my lesson, and I won't get caught that way again.

"I enjoy riding in my car, and am benefited by it if I don't attempt too much. Twenty miles on a good road exhilarates me. But last summer Julian

and I went in my Ford from Roxbury to the Massachusetts coast in two days. Julian drove like Jehu, and the long hours of rapid traveling were too stimulating for me. I did n't sleep well at night. It was as if I'd drank too much tea.

"Ford has a big heart, but his head is not so large except in his own line. He's not a reader. He does n't even read much in the newspapers, aside from the headlines. I've told him he ought at least to know the main events in the history of his own nation and of Europe. But he retorted that the men who brought on the great war knew history all right, and yet that did n't prevent their fighting.

"One day I was telling him what a great book I thought the Bible was — what noble literature; and he said, 'I have n't read it much, but I tell you what I think — Emerson's books and Thoreau's and yours will be read after the Bible is forgotten.'

"I laughed at him. I don't know when he reads my books, but Mrs. Ford has told me that he does. 'I can dip into them anywhere,' he says, 'and get interested at once. Nevertheless, sometimes I think you could say what you say with less words.'

"Well, he's genuine and I like the man. Mentally he's not the equal of Edison, who's a philosopher. A great mind that man has. You can't fool him. He never would have undertaken such a thing as Ford's peace mission. What Ford wanted was to 'get the boys out of the trenches by Christmas.' That phrase

haunted him. It was just the goodness of his heart that prompted him and led him astray. He did n't know those infernal Germans. He invited me to go over to Europe on his Peace Ship. I would have gone if I'd felt well, and I did go down to New York to see him off.

"President Wilson evidently values him and is apt to have him to dinner at the White House when Ford is in Washington.

"Ford has built a new house in recent years near Detroit. It cost a good many hundreds of thousands of dollars. He would gladly have lived on in his simple old home, but I think his wife wanted a larger establishment. I go there to visit them once in a while. The rooms have everything in them under the sun that a man could want.

"When Ford has spent a day at the factory, he comes home quite fagged out. His staff is always saving up questions for him to decide. However, he recovers quickly from his fatigue. All he needs is a night's rest. He sleeps well, and he digests his food well, though he's a sort of haphazard eater in a light way. He has no rheumatism nor pains, is lean and limber and wonderfully active. If we're out walking, he'll sometimes start off as fast as he can go for a run into the woods and back.

"I'll say to him: 'You've reached an age when that sort of thing is n't good for you. You must n't start so suddenly. Don't start in high. Start in low.'

"I've induced him to adopt my habit of lying down in the middle of the day after dinner for a nap, and he agrees that he is better for it.

"Once I made a voyage to Cuba with him on his yacht. Crew and servants together numbered twenty-eight men. There were a cook and a steward, and they'd concoct the Lord only knows what for us to eat. Ford does n't care for such extras, and he's wise; but it was a long time before he finally got it through the heads of the cook and steward that we did n't want all those fancy rich dishes. He had it his own way at last, though I suspect that the men felt as if they were n't earning their wages.

"While we were in Cuba, Ford had a fancy that he'd like to buy a big sugar plantation he saw. The price was three million dollars. The plantation ploughing was being done with oxen, six yoke to a plough, and all the methods of work were slow and antiquated. Ford wanted to use tractors and show what could be done with other labor-saving devices and efficient management. But his wife vetoed the project. She did n't want him to take on the added responsibility. It could n't help but prey on his time and be a care he ought not to be burdened with.

"His personal expenses must be pretty heavy in spite of his simple tastes. I was at Boston with him a while ago. There was a little party of us, and our suite of rooms at the hotel cost forty dollars a day.

"I made an auto trip with Ford and Edison re-



cently to West Virginia and North Carolina. Ford was as active physically as ever. His views outside his own sphere used to be childish, but they've become broader.

"Ford was considering being a candidate for the Senate, and Edison said to him: 'What do you want to do that for? You can't speak. You would n't say a damned word. You'd be mum.'

"Ford told Edison to go to the Senate too, but Edison said: 'I'm too deaf. I could n't hear anything. But if I did go I'd try to repeal all the patent laws. They've never done me any good or any other inventor.'

"'That's so,' Ford agreed. 'The profits in inventions go to the manufacturers.'

"Ford keeps track of me and every little while inquires, or has his secretary find out, how I am. If anything is wrong, he gets busy to see that I have the best of care. When my wife and I were visiting in Washington, he had a car sent from his agency there to our stopping-place every day with a man to take us to ride, and we could use it as much as we pleased. Yes, Ford is one of my devoted friends, really."

## XXI

*November, 1918*

### THE WORLD WAR

I REACHED Riverby at dusk of a chill, windy, half-clouded day toward the end of November and found Burroughs in his bark-covered study sitting meditating in the gloom that was somewhat mitigated by the lively glow of the open fire. He was thinner than I had seen him before — weighed only one hundred and thirty pounds — and he was not so vigorous physically, though essentially sound in body and mind.

“I’ve sawed and split wood for my fire to-day,” he said, “but I have to be careful not to over-exert. I’m sleeping remarkably well — perhaps because of a new food I’m using. A New York doctor recommended it to me. It’s a very palatable and nutritive soup made from veal knucklebone. I have the soup every day for supper. I’m in the habit of drinking a cup of hot water just before going to bed and the first thing when I get up, and that’s good for me. Our West Park water is rather poor and I use water from the Catskills for drinking purposes.

“I’ve been out to Toledo recently to review a crowd of forty thousand school-children at the unveiling of a statue of me, but I did n’t enjoy the

occasion, although I felt grateful for what everybody did to make things pleasant for me.

"I intend to spend the winter at West Park. Every time I go South I'm sick, and I've concluded it would be unwise for me to go there again. I'd enjoy spending the cold months in California, but the journey is too long. I don't like winter.

"Walking tires me now. Two or three miles is exhausting. What I wish I had is a donkey that would carry me around in a safe and leisurely way on the local lanes and paths — a donkey like the one I rode at the Grand Cañon."

We talked most of the World War which the armistice had brought to an end that very month.

In the fall of 1915 Burroughs had said: "The war has stirred me intensely, ever since it began last year. At first I spent a great deal of time reading the papers. I'd read several of them each day, and not let anything escape me that they printed about the war. But doing this disturbed me mentally. I was injuring my health. So I curtailed my newspaper-reading, but continued to devour magazine war articles and war books.

"I'm not satisfied with the part our country has played in the upheaval. President Wilson is a conservative man — a scholar and a coiner of phrases. I get impatient with him. I've often wished that Roosevelt was in his place to deal with the Germans

in their madness. Roosevelt would have showed his teeth some and brought them to terms. But I don't think he'd have been precipitate in involving this country in the war. He ain't a fool.

"The final upshot of the conflict will be to put an end to war. We are bound to abandon the folly of settling differences between nations by a barbarous trial of strength. War has become too horrible, and modern weapons are too tremendously destructive. This slaughtering of young men by the million, this hell turned loose on the earth, will kill the military spirit, I hope. The lesson will be burned into the very souls of the fighting nations. Think how such a war drains off the national wealth — the great reservoirs of accumulated riches — and what a check it must be to have so many of the bravest, most vigorous men killed.

"The war is no doubt a disappointment to the Germans. I think they would give anything to get back to where they were before it started. Oh, yes! their plans miscarried. England upset their plans completely.

"The Germans hate England because she won't give up what she has got; and I tell you she'll fight long and hard before she does give up the possessions she has acquired. England is at home on the sea. She knows how to manage ships. Wherever her flag has gone it has carried justice and liberty and the spirit of fair play. That's where England is



so wise. The Germans thought the British Empire would break up, but everywhere was loyalty. They thought we would take Canada. They were fools to so misread the world. Lord! Canada would fight us tooth and nail before she'd let us annex her.

"Government in Germany is in many respects admirable, but the way it curtails personal liberty and muzzles the press is unbearable. Worst of all is the insolence of its military. The men in the army can commit almost any misdemeanor in their treatment of the civil population and go unpunished. The Government position is that the military can do no wrong. We can learn much from Germany, but we don't want Germanism stuffed down our throats. You hardly dare blow your nose in the street over there; and you can't hang a washcloth out of a window to dry without being called to account for it. I never want to set foot in their cursed country if that's the way they manage.

"I'm thankful that a good many tens of thousands of their soldiers have been killed and will no longer menace us. How like the devil they have fought, and what an unlimited supply of men Germany apparently has to sacrifice! It seems as if the rocks and trees had turned to men.

"A while ago two letters that I wrote about the war were published in the 'New York Tribune.' They evidently hit the mark; for I got a good many replies. Some of the professors over in Germany

wrote to tell me that I was misinformed and did not understand the real situation; and I had several most brutal anonymous letters from Germans in this country. Of course the writers were cowards or they would have signed their names, but I knew their nationality because the handwriting was characteristically German. One said he had heard that I had recently been ill, and now he hoped to hear of my death. Another declared I ought to be put in an asylum — I needed to be looked after. A third said he wished I could be tied to a torpedo and shot at a British warship. Whether he thought I was hard enough to penetrate the metal armor, I don't know."

When we discussed the conflict two years later, Burroughs's comments ran in this wise:

"Now that we are in this big war, I'm trying to do my part to help win. I had a piece of ground at Riverby sowed to wheat, but when harvest-time came I was away, and Julian had the wheat cut and fed to the hens, much to my disgust. He thought it was too light and weedy to warrant the expense of threshing. I buy Liberty Bonds, and I practice economy in my habits of living. I try to save in the war-winning essentials. For one thing I cut down on gasoline by not using my automobile as freely as I naturally would. But how utterly thoughtless and reckless most people seem to be in this matter of war conservation! How they do spend their money! They

waste right and left, burn up gasoline for pleasure tearing about the country, waste food, clothing—everything!

“The war is a fight of democracy against the damned German despotism. One or the other will be crushed, and we’ve got to beat. I was reading a book the other night entitled ‘Europe Unbound,’ and I was so stirred up by it that, I gracious! I could n’t sleep afterward. The Germans believe in Prussianism to the bottom of their shoes, and scorn democracy. The two things can’t dwell together on the same planet.

“The Germans have no imagination, no ideality, and they don’t add anything to the joy of human life. They have a good many of the swine traits. They’re rooters — always delving down in the roots of things. They know more about the roots of trees than about the leaves. Then, too, there is their love of tyranny, of mastery, and the belief that might is right.

“I’ve always liked individual Germans, but as a nation I detest them. The scoundrels are already talking about the next war. That conceit has got to be taken out of them. Just the thought of seeing them whipped is enough to keep me alive for years. I’m going to try hard to live to see the war through.

“If Haig only keeps up his hammering of the German lines, we’ll knock hell out of ’em. I like the idea of America’s building a great fleet of airships. If we

had twenty thousand of them on the battle-front, how they would scatter destruction! Everything behind the German lines clear to Berlin would be blown to the devil.

"We can do good work building submarine-chasers. Some of the new ones fairly make the water hot, they are so swift. The German submarines are the worst menace we have to contend with, and to think that they were invented by an American! Confound that man Holland!

"It is a great good fortune that we have at the head of the nation in this crisis a person of Wilson's caliber, with such high principles and so clear-headed — as fortunate as it was that we had Lincoln in the Civil War. I admire his statesmanship. At the last presidential election, when I was making up my mind who to vote for, I held the portraits of Wilson and Hughes before me and said, 'They're both good men, but Wilson is the broader, bigger, better type.'

"That decided me. So I voted for Wilson and I have n't for a moment regretted it since. I know Hughes, and have had a warm liking for him. Indeed, he might have received my vote had it not been for his attitude toward Wilson in the campaign. He was so narrow, so partisan, so unfair, I could n't stomach him.

"Roosevelt, who has been a rather close friend of mine, showed up no better. The way he abused Wilson, calling names and denouncing him, almost



led to my writing Roosevelt a hot letter. Yes, his political course during the war has been a great disappointment. He always wants to be in the lime-light and can't bear to have Wilson the man at the helm in the present world turmoil. Here is the most wonderful time in all history, and Roosevelt, who has been President and is a natural leader and a man of the most vigorous convictions and assertiveness, is not at the head of national affairs, which he feels should be his place. He was n't even able to get into the army — and how sore he has been all the time! How he has ranted and scoffed at Wilson! I've been ashamed of him. Events have proved Wilson's wisdom and far-sightedness, and I wish Roosevelt was generous enough to acknowledge it.

"I have been critical of Wilson myself at times. If I'd had my way we'd have been in the war sooner, but I know now that it would n't have been wise. The President is patient and far-seeing, and he did right to wait until he had the country behind him. What a burden he carries! When he gets any leisure to think, or to say his prayers, I don't see. His message in response to the Pope prolonged my life. I was delighted with its sober, serious statement. It was done so inimitably well that I can never cease to applaud it. The shot told. It makes the Germans howl. They call him names, and heap no end of abuse on him. A determined man with ideals like his has the people back of him and won't stop short

of victory. All his war papers are like messages written in the sky. They get the attention of the entire world, and deserve it.

"In a letter to Secretary Daniels of the navy I said something commendatory of one of the presidential messages, and he showed the letter to his chief. As a result I got a very appreciative missive from Mr. Wilson. It was a good deal for him to write to me in the thick of things as he is.

"I have great respect for Daniels. He's an able and independent man, and criticism of him can be largely traced to his cutting off booze from the naval officers. They are all down on him for interfering with their ancient right of getting drunk. Many of the people have taken up the same hue and cry. Only yesterday one of them was talking to me like a fool about him."

Now it was November 22, 1918, and as we sat before the fire in the bark-covered study, Burroughs said:

"Well, I have lived to see what I so longed for — the crushing of the Hun. Surely, he is so crushed that he will trouble the world no more. The end of the war has been a great relief to me. It was the war that I thought of last when I went to bed, and it was the war that I thought of the first thing when I awoke. Undoubtedly the tension was harmful, and now that peace has come I've begun to take on flesh.

“When the peace celebrations were held on the day the armistice was signed, the eleventh of this month, I was so elated that I went to Poughkeepsie to share in the rejoicing. But there was such a redundancy of noise and the whole affair was so boisterous and undignified that I had to retire to the Y.M.C.A. building to get out of it. The only thing I remember with pleasure was meeting a soldier who’d been over the top on the European battleground — actually been over the top! I looked at him with a feeling of awe. What a hero he seemed!”

## XXII

### LAST YEARS

THE prospects of Burroughs's acquiring unaided such a donkey as he had expressed a wish for seemed not very promising, and after I returned home I wrote to Henry Ford suggesting that he might be willing to find out where and how a suitable donkey could be obtained for his friend.

Some weeks later I received this telegram:

Have located young Will Droken Burro, Denver, Colorado. Please give shipping address.

E. G. LIEBOLD

At first I would not accept the message. Will Droken Burro was no one that I knew, and I had no interest in the fact that he had been located in Denver. Nor had I ever heard of E. G. Liebold. But after puzzling over the matter for a few hours, it occurred to me that what the telegram referred to was a *well-broken donkey*, and I forwarded directions to have the animal sent to Burroughs at West Park.

January 1, 1919, Burroughs wrote: "When you let the cat out of the bag that I wanted a donkey, you let the donkey in. She has arrived, and I expect to enjoy her a great deal. Her four young legs ought



to supplement my old legs just the right way. I shall soon find out."

A week later he wrote: "The little beast is very free with her heels — so free that Dr. Barrus dare not go near her. She kicked the hired man the other morning. I shall be on my guard when I ride her. We are expecting a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Ford. He must mount the donkey."

On February 20th he wrote: "The donkey is no good for me. I am going to give her away or shoot her. Do you want her — saddle and bridle and blanket? A man here is half a mind to take her, but if he does not I must find some one else. Your boys might have fun with her if they kept clear of her heels."

I was much disappointed over the donkey episode. What a chance there was for mild adventures and a new viewpoint! I have been told that when Burroughs found out how freely the donkey used her heels, some of the things he said about her and about me and Henry Ford's secretary would make rather racier reading than any of his remarks that I have reported.

Something about Mr. Ford's interest in Burroughs in these last years was related to me in a picturesque way by one of the Roxbury natives, who said: "Once when Ford was here visiting John, they were walking up through the timber of a birch grove on the old farm and found Burroughs's nephew cutting

down the trees, intending to get rid of the grove and have a field he could cultivate. John seemed to feel bad about it.

“‘This is the first place where I ever studied the nature of birds,’ he said to Ford.

“‘Well,’ Ford says, ‘then the grove ought to stay here. Don’t let ’em cut it.’

“‘But I can’t help myself,’ John told him. ‘The farm belongs to my nephew.’

“‘We’ll fix that,’ Ford says, and he talked to the nephew and agreed to buy him out for fifteen thousand dollars.

“So when he got back to the house, he wrote a check for that amount and gave the farm to John.

“I understand that twice Ford gave John enough to cover the expenses of him and one or two companions for a winter in California.

“A jewelry store in the village keeps a line of books, and has all of Burroughs’s. Since automobiles have begun to run, people who come to visit John stop there and get one of his books and take it up to the farm and ask him to write his name in it. He’s always glad to do that. John has lots of visitors — mostly long-haired men and short-haired women.

“He likes to be photographed, but I don’t know as he is any worse in that respect than Ford and Edison. Whenever they make a trip they’re sure to take along a photographer to photograph ’em.”

I did n’t see Burroughs again after November,

1918, but he wrote me occasional letters which I quote from below:

*March, 1919:* "I am a Wilson man through and through and a League of Nations man through and through. Wilson is one of the few men of the ages. A League of Nations is bound to come. It will be the issue of the next presidential election. The Republican Party will be knocked higher than a kite, and will wake up when it comes down. The people are bound to put an end to war and to have a permanent peace."

*April, 1920:* "I have been to Yama Farms where Mr. Seaman gave me a great birthday blow-out, inviting about thirty friends to join in the hullabaloo.

"I am for Hoover because the party leaders do not want him, and they do not want him because they know they cannot use him. He is a man who does not think in terms of party politics, but in terms of the greatest good to the whole people. And then, I think he has great executive ability and that is the kind of man we want in an executive office.

"We spent three months in California and had really a golden winter."

*September, 1920:* "I shall vote for Cox, but am doubtful if he wins. It is hard to get any idealism or disinterestedness in the average man. Time was when nations throve by preying on one another — the way of the barbarian — but in our time the leading nations of the world form one family. What

is good for one is good for all, and what is injurious to one is injurious to all. Progress in civilization ought to result in their getting closer together with a common purpose and coöperation. If it does not, civilization is a failure. I wish I felt sure that America would, in this crisis, measure up to what she ought to do, but narrowness and provincialism may win the day.

"We plan to go to California again in late November. I thrive better there and cannot fight the winters we have in our climate."

He went, but while there became seriously ill. It was presently evident that he could not recover, and his friends decided to take him back East before his failing strength made the journey impossible. He was eager to go, and was confident that once he reached home beside the Hudson he would get well. But when only a few hours more were needed to finish the trip, he died, soon after midnight, March 29, 1921, as the train he was on was speeding across Ohio. How pathetic that the life of this lover of the quiet country and of familiar home surroundings should have come to an end far from his native haunts on a railway train!

In his will was this paragraph:

"It is my wish that the stone which marks my last resting-place shall be of native unhewn rock — not white marble or polished granite — and I wish my funeral expenses shall not exceed one hundred



dollars, that my casket shall be free of ornament and as plain and simple as possible. Let me not be made to appear proud and fond of vain show when I am dead."

His grave is at Roxbury in a hillside pasture of the old farm, beside the big glacial boulder on which, as a boy, he often sat and dreamily looked off over the wide panorama of heights and valleys that were in view.

The sentiment expressed in the will was characteristic of the man. Pride and ostentation and the seeking of notoriety were entirely foreign to him. He was a rare soul, courageous, independent, a teacher, a prophet, sincere, eloquent, and inspiring in what he wrote, and with great personal charm for all who in any way sympathized with his tastes and ideals.

**THE END**



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